

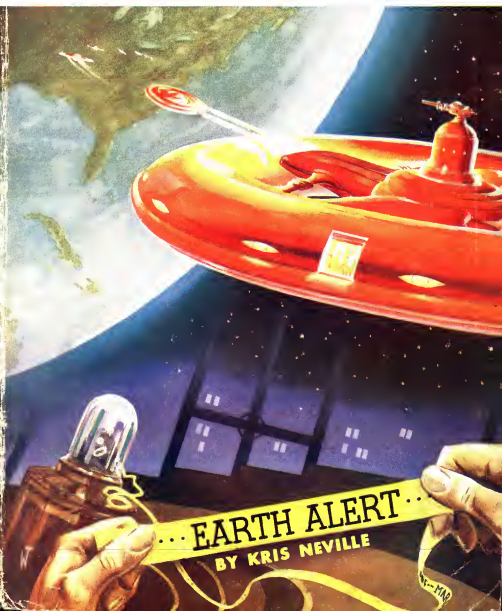
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IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

FEBRUARY, 1953

35c



Introducing the

AUTHOR



Philip K. Dick



ONCE, when I was very young, I came across a magazine directly below the comic books called STIRRING SCIENCE STORIES. I bought it, finally, and carried it home, reading it along the way. Here were ideas, vital and imaginative. Men moving across the universe, down into sub-atomic particles, into time; there was no limit. One society, one given environment was transcended. Stf was Faustian; it carried a person up and beyond.

I was twelve years old, then. But I saw in stf the same thing I see now: a medium in which the full play of human imagination can operate, ordered, of course, by reason and consistent development. Over the years stf has grown, matured toward greater social awareness and responsibility.

I became interested in writing stf

when I saw it emerge from the ray gun stage into studies of man in various types and complexities of society.

I enjoy writing stf; it is essentially communication between myself and others as interested as I in knowing where present forces are taking us. My wife and my cat *Magnificat*, are a little worried about my preoccupation with stf. Like most stf readers I have files and stacks of magazines, boxes of notes and data, parts of unfinished stories, a huge desk full of related material in various stages. The neighbors say I seem to "read and write a lot". But I think we will see our devotion pay off. We may yet live to be present when the public libraries begin to carry the stf magazines, and someday, perhaps, even the school libraries.

—Philip K. Dick

IMAGINATION

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The Editorial

WE'VE finally found what we believe to be an authentic flying saucer report—that is, one we can personally vouch for as not “just one of those many rumors.”

WE were up in Michigan over the past weekend watching our gladiators from the University of Illinois drop an atom bomb on a much surprised (and demoralized) Wolverine football team. Before returning home we made the rounds with some of our many relatives. One of them, our sister-in-law, Helen Barnes, of Lansing (where they have a *real* football team, incidentally) had a very interesting story to tell us. Helen is a school teacher, and about as solid a citizen as they come. She's a cautious gal, not inclined to spreading wild tales—even less inclined to take stock in them.

SHE asked us, somewhat hesitantly, if we believed in flying saucers. We said that we did—knowing that Helen was not trying to make idle conversation since she is *not* a science fiction reader and has never shown any interest in any of the “imaginative” ideas emanating from the Evanston branch of the family. So we asked Helen why this sudden interest in flying saucers. She laughed somewhat embarrassedly and lifted our eyebrows with: “I guess it's 'because I've finally seen one.”

NO excited statement. Just a matter of fact reply. Pressing

the matter we got the following account from her. The incident occurred the previous week (we're writing this editorial on election day) during her lunch hour. She was talking to a group of eight pupils on the school grounds, when one of them said to her: “Miss Barnes, what kind of a ship do you think that is?” She followed the youth's pointing finger and saw something in the sky, almost directly overhead, but at what she (and the others) estimated to be at a great height. It was a disc-shaped object appearing to be approximately the size of a medicine ball. Its color was silvery and it seemed to be hanging suspended in the air. As far as she could determine, it was a solid mass—no ports, windows, etc.

ALL of the eight students saw the same thing. She turned to the youth who called her attention to it and said that she didn't know what it was. The student became quite excited and said it looked like a flying saucer the newspapers had been talking about.

HELEN was skeptical. She stared at the object, reasoning that it must be a balloon or an optical illusion. It certainly was not a cloud since the day was clear with bright sunshine. The optical illusion theory was shattered when the object began to move across the sky, slowly at first, and then with great, unbelievable speed. (No sound, no vapor trail—just rapid movement.)

That left only the balloon possibility and a mighty slim one because of the speed with which the object streaked across the sky. This slim possibility was shot to pieces when suddenly Helen (and the eight students) saw the object suddenly "turn on end" and present an edge-wise view, evidencing a shape that Helen could only describe as being "saucer-like."

AT the same moment it "turned on end," the sun's rays were reflected from its surface in a brilliant silver flash. Then it "righted" itself and appeared to shoot straight upward, becoming smaller and smaller until it finally vanished from sight.

THE eight students were excited over what they had seen; Helen was nonplussed. She thought of making a report of the incident but her conservative nature decided against it. After all, people would laugh at the school teacher with the vivid imagination.

Well, we're making the report here—and Helen doesn't know about it—yet. We trust the publication of the facts will not cause her embarrassment; certainly we believe her. Her description was as detailed as it could possibly be without the aid of scientific instruments — and it was verified by eight people.

WHY all the fuss? No fuss, just a recounting of an incident we know is true—further cementing our own certainty that the flying saucers are real. We don't pretend to know where they come from—but we will stick our editorial necks out by reiterating that we believe they are extra-terrestrial. Somebody prove us wrong!

SPEAKING of flying saucers, our cover this month shows a few of them leaving a space station outside the Earth's atmosphere. We think it's one of Bill Terry's finest jobs, and we mention it because Bill has another terrific cover for our next issue. But one of an entirely different nature. Along with the cover, next month's feature brings back Geoff St. Reynard with a fine novel, **THE ENCHANTED CRUSADE**. And as an added sneak preview, after that Daniel F. Galouye will be featured with his novel length, **THE FIST OF SHIVA**. This is a really top-notch science fiction novel, with the most unusual cover Madge has ever presented. But more about that next issue.

A WORD about the forthcoming 11th World Science Fiction Convention. The time is September 5th, 6th and 7th. The place, Philadelphia, the Bellevue Stratford Hotel. For advance news, bulletins, etc., send your \$1.00 membership now to 11th World S-F Convention, P. O. Box 2019, Philadelphia 3, Pa. . . . See you next month . . . wh



"Primitive smoke signals, no doubt."



EARTH ALERT!

By
Kris Neville

What defense could she raise against mutant science — telepathy, invisibility, teleportation— especially since Earth was not aware of its danger!

CHAPTER I

WHEN Julia (she pronounced the name without the "a" at the end) was twenty-four, she inherited \$22,000 from

an obscure uncle in California. After deducting taxes and administrative expenses, the California State Court ordered the money transferred to her bank account. It came to \$20,247.50.



She had been working in a local book store. "I haven't the vaguest idea why it came to me," she told the curious and covertly envious customers. "I guess he just didn't know anybody else."

She was a small, slender girl. Her eyes were bright and enthusiastic, her open smile so friendly that it was infectious.

The first afternoon when the money was actually in the bank under her own name, her father asked, "Well, what are you going to do with it?" He was genuinely curious. He owned his own home and was about to retire on a pension. He felt uncomfortable in the face of \$20,247.50—for which he was not able even to imagine a use.

Julia said, "I haven't exactly made up my mind yet." She intended to shop around for a husband, but she did not say this. She thought it would sound very caldous to say: I'm going to buy me a husband: I've always wanted one.

* * *

Julia gave two weeks notice at the book store. When the time was up she took her last pay check and went to one of the modest dress shops and bought herself a conservative brown suit.

"You have a very nice figure," the clerk told her.

"Thank you." She studied him critically and then shook her head sadly. He wouldn't do.

I've got to be sure I get the right one, she thought. I'll know him when I see him, she reassured her-

self. It certainly isn't this one.

There ought, she thought, to be a lot of eligible bachelors in Hollywood. The movies ought to attract them.

* * *

Two days later she walked down to the bank and instructed the teller to transfer \$5,000 of her money to a checking account in her name at the Security First National Bank in Los Angeles.

She told her father she was going to take a little vacation.

"There's plenty of eligible bachelors here," he said.

"Why dad!" she exclaimed indignantly. ". . . And anyway, none of them ever has asked me."

"God help the man you set your mind on, that's all I can say."

CHAPTER II

OUT beyond the orbit of the moon there was a huge, wheel-shaped space station. Its rapid spin pressed the equivalent of one Earth gravity against its broad, thick rim. Once when the distortion field failed, the Mt. Palomar telescope tracked it for the better part of an hour, but earth astronomers attributed the track either to an irregularity in the photographic plate or to some peculiarity in the atmosphere.

Near the hub where the gravity was weak, the nine aliens lived; in the two rim compartments lived the mutants. There were almost a thousand of the latter—both male

and female—in the larger compartment; and fewer than thirty—all male—in the smaller one.

"Soon, now," the mutants told each other with growing excitement, "we shall go down and kill them."

The aliens stepped up the power in the larger of the two transmitters. "Our indoctrination is perfect," they reassured themselves. "The mutants will not get out of hand."

CHAPTER III

JULIA bought a round trip ticket on the Greyhound Bus and carried her bag to the waiting room. A few minutes later the bus drew up outside, bringing with it the exciting travel-smell of hot rubber and gasoline. Most of the passengers climbed out to stretch in the winter sunlight.

"Fifteen minutes," the driver said.

Julia picked up her bag and carried it outside. She gave her ticket to the driver, who was standing by the door, smoking a cigarette. Half way back in the bus she found an empty seat. She hoisted the bag—standing on her tip toes—to the rack above and settled into the seat, primly rearranging her dress.

But she was unable to relax. She stared out the window; the building across the lot presented an uninteresting and windowless expanse of brick. She yawned nervously and surveyed the other passengers who were beginning to filter back.

The driver dropped heavily into his seat behind the wheel; he pulled the door closed, and the motor purred. He counted his passengers in the mirror.

Julia tightened her lips, and her face wrinkled into a stubborn little frown. Her finger tapped restlessly on her knee. She resolved to bring the husband back with her.

She could buy the Castle Place out on Mannor Street for \$4,000. She would have \$10,000 left to buy him—to make the down payment on, at least—Beck's Hardware Store. From that they would realize a steady and an adequate income. She would give Saturday teas for the society women and show her husband off—in a neat, double breasted suit—in church on Sunday. They would go to the movies twice a week; they would go dancing once a month. They would have three children, two boys and a girl. She would let her husband go moose hunting in Canada once a year, and weekends during bass season they'd go up to the lodge (I should be able to buy the Roger's cabin on Center Creek for a few hundred, she thought) and fish.

She suddenly wished she had flown to Hollywood. She was in a great hurry to get there, get the selecting over and done with, and get back.

At Joplin a young man got on and sat down beside her. She watched him, from time to time, out of the corner of her eye. Outside, the huge chat piles (said by the

civic boosters to be the biggest in the world) paraded by the bus. Ought to start snowing again pretty soon, she thought . . . It will be fun to swim in the Pacific in February.

AFTER the bus crossed the Missouri-Kansas line she turned to the young man seated beside her. "I'm going to Hollywood," she said. "Going to get in the movies?" "Oh, no," Julia said. " . . . no." Her finger tapped impatiently on her knee.

"That's why most pretty girls go to Hollywood."

Julia blushed. Her eyes, brown and friendly, searched his face. "I'm the domestic sort," she said. "My name's Julia. What's yours?"

"My name's William."

"That's a nice name."

"Julia's a nice name, too."

"I majored in literature in high school," Julia said. "I like to read. I worked in a book store back home."

William shifted uncomfortably: "I don't read much."

Julia frowned. "I read a lot."

"Reading's all right."

"I like to curl up with a good book."

They fell silent.

Julia bit her lip, nipping it into redness with her white, even teeth. I guess I'm not much of a conversationalist, she thought. For a moment she felt tiny and afraid.

Dispiritedly she searched in her sandwich bag for an apple. She

brought it out and regarded it intently.

"You want half?"

"No, thanks."

She found a pen knife in her hand bag and began to peel the apple, wrinkling her forehead in concentration.

The bus was in a state supervised section of the highway. It hit a chuck hole, and the pen knife slipped, slicing deeply into her finger. Annoyed and embarrassed, she watched the blood well up in the cut. She put the apple in her lap. "Oh, dear . . ." She held the finger away from her.

WILLIAM bent forward. "Euuuu," he said sympathetically. "Here . . ." He reached for his handkerchief. But before the hand got to it, he reconsidered, perhaps remembering that handkerchiefs are unsanitary. "Euuuu," he said again, shuddering. He moved his hands helplessly and stared at the blood trickling from the finger onto the floor. "Euuuu."

Julia decided: No, he certainly won't do.

She glared angrily at her finger.

And the cut closed; the edges came together and joined in a neat, red line. The blood ceased to flow. The red line vanished as the flesh knitted. The finger was as scarless as it had been moments before.

"I'll be God damned," the young man said.

" . . . that's very odd," Julia said. She held up the finger. She put the

pen knife in her lap beside the apple and felt the finger.

"You must have some rare type of blood," William said.

She wiggled the finger. "You mean something like the reverse of hemophilia?"

"I don't guess I read enough to know big words: just some rare type of blood."

"Nothing like this ever happened before," Julia said, still watching the finger suspiciously. "I've never heard of anything like it."

Hello.

"Hello," she answered.

"What did you say?" the young man asked.

"I said, 'Hello'."

"Hello."

"Didn't you say hello a moment ago?" Julia said, looking at him with an annoyed little frown on her face.

"No."

"No."

"That's funny"

Hello. Where are you?

"I'm right here beside you," she said.

"What are you talking about?" the young man said.

What planet are you on?

William's lips hadn't moved that time. She'd been watching. She thought the young man was somehow trying to make fun of her.

"Excuse me," she said coldly. She picked up her apple and her pen knife and her handbag and brushed past him into the aisle. She looked around, saw a seat three rows back on the opposite side of the bus. She

went to it and settled down, moving over against the window.

William was staring around at her with a puzzled expression on his face.

Hello.

She jerked her head away from him angrily and stared out the window at the cold, barren plain. He's not at all nice, she thought.

Hello.

Grimly she refused to listen. He must be doing it with a sort of radio set, she thought. It's probably some sort of thing they advertize in magazines for \$2.98. She blinked her eyes. I wish he'd stop. I don't think it's a bit funny.

Hello.

After a few more miles, the voice stopped.

Morosely Julia finished peeling her apple.

IT was cold in the Hollywood bus depot; chill rain drizzled down from a leaden sky.

She stood in the protection of the building, bag in hand, shivering miserably. Twice she waved futilely for a cab. On the third attempt, she got one.

The driver opened the door for her, and she bolted through the rain to its inviting back seat.

"Take me to some nice hotel," she said.

The driver flipped up the flag and gunned the motor.

Five minutes later she was paying him ninety cents; leaving the extra dime out of the dollar for a tip;

she ran for the hotel steps.

After she registered, she asked the fatherly old gentleman at the desk, "Where does a person go to meet people?" Water trickled down from her hair and across her face.

He bent forward and narrowed his eyes. "Meet people?" he asked; his tone had grown cold and suspicious.

She bit her lip in embarrassment. Did I say something wrong? she thought. "Never mind," she said, wanting to cry. "I'm not going to stay in this horrible town a minute more than I have to!"

"She," the bellboy said when he came down stairs, "is crazy."

"What do you mean?"

"You should have seen her walk through the door." He pronounced the last word emphatically.

"You mean doorway."

"I mean door," the bell boy said. "It was closed when she done it."

"I'm going to have to keep an eye on her," the clerk said, clucking his tongue in dry disapproval.

NOW how did I do that? Julia asked herself. She walked to the door and put her hand through it. She wiggled her fingers. She half-opened the door and put her hand through it again. It came out on the other side. She moved her arm back and forth. It felt prickly.

She crossed to the bed and sat down. This isn't so good, she thought. I've got to figure out how I did that.

She closed her eyes tightly. Other

people can't put their hands through doors, she thought. Other people can't heal cuts by looking at them, either . . . I never could before; I don't feel any different from other people.

And then a little chill of fear ran up and down her spine. Suppose the bed, the floor, the earth below were suddenly to become as unsubstantial as the door. I might drop clear through to 'China, to, to .

Her fingernails were making red creases in her palms.

She stood up and stamped on the floor. Her knees trembled. The floor was solid.

She went to the door. It is solid, she thought. She let her fingers explore the surface. She sighed, feeling the rough texture of the wood.

Now, she thought. I can reach through it.

Her hand passed through it easily.

She went back to the bed and sat down.

I did it with my mind, she thought. I wanted to put my hand through the door, and I did. In front of the bell hop, I suddenly felt so sure that I could walk through the door that I did.

I'm going to figure out how I did that, she thought, her mouth tightening into a thin little line of resolution. Because if I learned to do it, anyone else could learn

Hello.

Her hands clenched into annoyed little fists. She went to the window

and looked out. She opened the door and looked up and down the corridor. No William.

Hello.

"He . . . hello."

Good, you can hear me. What planet are you on?

"The same planet everyone else is."

. . . the third one from the sun?

She tried to remember her high school science survey course; and she found that she could remember it very clearly. *Of course, it is.*

That's funny.

SHE realized that she had thought her last statement, and that he (she was sure that the voice belonged to a he) had answered it nevertheless. She was exchanging thoughts with someone!

Hello, she thought weakly. She gulped. What do you look like? How many arms and legs do you have?

Two of each.

Her mind was very alert and active. She could think with great clarity. *Describe yourself.* She received a mental impression of him.

She let out her breath. He was human, after all; as human as anybody. And handsome.

She laughed softly with relief: since he has never been able to find anyone like himself, he thought I was from another planet!

Ek?

Describe yourself again.

He complied.

Suddenly she knew with absolute

certainty that this was the one she was looking for. Out of all the people on earth, here was a man made for her.

Could you put your hand through a wooden door?

Of course.

She smiled happily. She meant to have him.

Hello.

Hello.

There was silence.

She wrinkled her forehead and tapped her knee. He had ceased transmitting.

He'll be back, she thought with satisfaction. I wonder what size suit he wears? I think I'll buy him a nice wool one. I want my husband to look presentable.

Smiling, she went to the phone. She called her bank and ordered her account transferred to the all-night branch in Los Angeles. She wanted to have her money available so she could leave town to go to him the moment she found out where he lived; or (assuming he came to her) to have it handy so she could leave town with him the moment he proposed to her—even if it were in the middle of the night.

After that, she went to the door and put her hand through it.

I'm going to have to figure this out, she thought. If I figure out how I did it, I'm sure I can teach other people. I'm no different than they are; and I don't intend to be.

She went back to the bed and sat down and began to think.

And she discovered that she could remember the greater part of everything she'd ever read.

CHAPTER IV

CALVIN practiced teleportation for endless hours. He kept the metal ball Forential had given him in almost constant motion.

He would exclaim delightedly and hurl it toward one of the twenty-seven other mutants in his compartment. Until the time he hit John in the back of the head with it, his intended victims had always parried it. John lay in a pool of blood, and Calvin began to cry — loud, shrill wails of despair and contrition. When Forential came, he knew instinctively what had happened.

Calvin represented the only failure the aliens had experienced in their mutation program; ten years ago his mind had ceased to develop. But for Forential's intercession, the council would have had him destroyed long ago; Forential, like a proud parent, kept hoping to overcome Calvin's heredity.

Forential waved his tentacles in exasperation. "You, here, Walt," he said. "We'll have to hurry. I'll show you how, and you can do it."

Walt, the most adept mutant in the compartment, listened attentively and then began to heal John. His face wrinkled in deep concentration. Flesh came together; blood ceased to flow; bone knitted. Forential grunted approval.

"Watch Walt, now," the alien in-

structed. "He's doing it nicely."

The others, breath held, watched.

At length John's head was healed. John stirred. He opened his eyes and looked about angrily. He stood up and hit Calvin in the face with his fist. Calvin, tears streaming down his cheeks, fingered his nose and sobbed brokenly. He put out a hand to touch Walt reassuringly.

Walt was his friend.

Walt—he had no other name—was six feet two inches tall, and, as Julia observed, handsome. His parents—he did not know this—were Americans; he had never seen them. He had been stolen from the hospital by Forential shortly after he was born. The alien, invisible, had come for him, clucked softly, wrapped him in a warm, invisible mantle, and taken him away; and the council of aliens had drawn a line through the names of another set of parents who had been exposed to the powerful, mutation-inducing field. Walt thought of Forential—in charge of their compartment—as a friend, as a parent, as a playmate, and as a counselor.

SHORTLY after Walt had healed John, the mutants of the smaller compartment gathered at the observation screen in the floor—or what was to them the floor: it was actually the broad rim of the wheel. They could look down at the screen and see a somewhat flickering image of Earth lying below their feet.

"Forential told us we'd get many strange powers . . ." one said.

Just before we went down to the planet, another completed the thought.

It's growing time, then.

They laughed together with excitement, and Calvin cracked his knuckles nervously.

"Let's play a trick on Forential," Calvin said. "Let's see if we can go through the bulkhead." His face was bright and hopeful. "Let's huh?"

Calvin raced to the far end of the compartment. "Come on!"

Like guilty children, they looked at one another. Then a few of them joined Calvin. *All right, let's.*

"Don't," Walt cautioned. "It's just machinery on the other side."

Why can't our thoughts penetrate it, then?

We aren't developed enough, Walt thought.

"Huh?" Calvin asked. He began pounding the bulkhead with his fist.

"No," one of the other mutants said. "Like this." He concentrated and tried to put a hand through the bulkhead.

We aren't developed enough.

Still the mutants continued. Since the aliens had stepped up the power in the two transmitters (power that closed the final connection in the mutants' brains and held it closed) the mutants were able to assault any problem with the full potentialities of the human brain. But even that was not enough. The aliens had planned carefully in order to keep the two mutant groups from discovering each other.

FORENTIAL came to make a special announcement. He spoke English with an accent that the mutants (who had learned the language from him) could not even imitate. As he surveyed them, his eyes shone with pride: they were a good, sturdy, healthy lot. "Children," he said. "Earth is now in the middle of a war. There will be little work left for us within another two months."

Calvin cried and waved his arms wildly and bounced the ball viciously around the room. Every earthman who killed an earthman was depriving him personally, of a victim. He wrung his hands.

"There'll be a thousand or so left, Calvin," Forential promised. "You must practice very diligently to be able to cope with them."

Calvin sniffed and shook his head. "I can kill that many in a minute. You stop the war, Forential, *please*."

"Think of it this way," Forential said. "The less work there is to do, the sooner you can return to your own planet."

"There's no earthmen to kill on Lyria," Calvin insisted stubbornly. "*Please stop the war.*"

"I'll see what I can do." The alien smiled kindly. "You have the proper spirit. You are all very good children. You hurry, now, and practice all you can."

I can see Lyria's star now, Walt thought. We'll be home in another year, then. How welcome that will be.

He had not broadcast the thought.

And suddenly, as if on another channel, another frequency, he felt Calvin in his mind and his mind in Calvin's—an odd, unexpected blending of thoughts that seemingly had occurred unconsciously.

Forential describes it so it is so pretty, our planet, Calvin was thinking: Green wartle rivers whack throw the ball at him, easy now . . . God, I hate those earthmen.

"I'll practice," Walt made Calvin say. He made Calvin hold the ball stationary. Then the contact between their minds was broken.

"Who did that?" Calvin demanded. "I'll hit him and break all his bones!"

Forential smiled sadly at Calvin and withdrew.

"It's nearly time," a mutant rejoiced. "God, I hate them, every one of them."

The mutants instinctively began forming their minds for the death radiation.

"They'll issue the rods shortly," Walt said.

Hatred blazed on Calvin's face. He had already forgotten about the contact a moment before. "I will kill them even without a rod."

"The radiation isn't lethal unless we have something to focus it with, remember that."

"With my hands!" Calvin cried happily. "I will kill them with my hands!"

Sweat beaded John's face. "There will be enough of killing."

It will be great pleasure to hunt them down.

They will kill some of us, Walt thought back. And, to himself: I wish I could be afraid.

Not me! Calvin thought joyously. It was uncertain when Calvin could telepath. *Not me!*

They have powerful weapons, too. Atom bombs, they are called. It will not be easy to kill them all. This thought came as a reminder from one of the aliens.

Calvin moved his powerful hands. "I can kill them all by myself."

THE smaller compartment, itself, was huge. To the left lay the hydroponics tanks, and to the right, the mutants' cubicles. In the center of the compartment was the games space where the mutants boxed and wrestled and exercised with weights. The walls of each cubicle were so designed as to produce the illusion of great distances. The mutants would be required to face vast open spaces, and their cubicles partially conditioned them for the experience. Huge as their world was, it was miniscular compared to the one that would confront them.

Calvin, sitting beside Walt in Walt's cubicle, was trying to express an abstract concept.

"Forential is afraid of earthmen," he said. He puckered his face in a frown. "I have just thought of that."

"Forential is afraid of everything," Walt said respectfully.

"I remember once when I shoved him he was very afraid. I should-

n't have," Calvin said. . . . it must be wonderful to be afraid."

"He is more advanced than we are."

"We can kill earthmen, though," Calvin said. "He's too afraid to; so we get to kill them for him."

"You got it wrong; you always get things wrong. We are killing earthmen for ourselves."

"Oh, yes," Calvin nodded. "I forget."

"Forential is a friend," Walt said. "He helps the Lyrians from the goodness of his heart."

"Earthmen are very bad."

"That's right."

"They are a great evil," Calvin said excitedly.

"They must be killed."

"Yes, yes, yes!" Calvin agreed. "I will kill them with my hands." He fell silent, thinking.

"there is a Lyrian on Earth," Walt said slowly "I have been hearing her thoughts."

"I can think to you," Calvin said proudly. "Listen." He concentrated. Muscles in his jaws quivered.

"not today," he said sadly. "My brain sometimes you know? sometimes"

"I am hearing thoughts from a Lyrian on Earth," Walt said in dull amazement. "Do you understand?"

"No; no."

"It's a female."

"All the females are on Lyria. This is a man's work. We are . . . are going to fight for females, isn't that right?"

"I tell you," Walt said, "she's

down there. The first time, I thought I was mistaken."

Calvin shook his head and flipped the ball toward an unseen mutant. "I can do that good," he said. The ball whistled back at him through the cubicle wall—leaving the wall unmarked as the atoms of one passed through the atomic spaces of the other. Happily, Calvin stopped it in mid flight.

"She's down there," Walt said. "I'll have to tell Forential about her."

Calvin tapped his head and smiled. "I think funny thoughts some times, too. You go see Forential. He can't help, but you go see him, Walt."

"I wasn't sure until just before you came in," Walt said.

"You go see him," Calvin said.

Walt stood up. "I was thinking with her just a little while ago. I don't understand it."

"I can think to you some times."

"I'll be back," Walt said.

AT the steel ladder leading up toward the alien section, Walt stopped and pressed the emergency-audience button. He waited for permission to ascend the ladder. Under no circumstance would he have ascended without it. The permissive light blinked.

He began to climb. At the ceiling hatch, he grunted and pressed against it with his shoulders. The hatch lifted away. He continued upward. Gravity lessened. His feet made soft, rustling noises.

He paused to rest at the first landing. He was in familiar territory. Fierut let the mutants from the smaller compartment help clean the machinery there every month or so. The air smelled of crisp ozone and hot oil.

Then as he rested, he saw movement behind one of the huge, softly purring machines. Although he could not know this, it was a female from the larger compartment. Muscles knotting, he waited.

He saw her again—the merest glint of flesh. She had not seen him. He half crouched.

It is impossible, he told himself. Only my compartment-mates and Forential and others of his race are on the ship.

Walt did not even think of trying for telepathic contact. Blind hatred overcame him. She's an earthling! he thought instinctively.

She has been left here for a test; that's it, he thought. Forential is testing me

He crept cautiously toward her. Still she was unaware of him.

I will break her neck, so . . .

No, he thought suddenly.

Forential has brought her here for questioning. He would be angry if I harmed her. He does not intend it for a test after all.

He crouched undecided, trying to think. I better leave her, he thought.

He was motionless, watching. If I killed her, he thought, Forential might be angry.

He slipped silently toward the

ladder.

Perhaps, he thought, Forential will give her to me to dispose of when he finishes with her.

He remembered seeing Forential dispose of several captured earthlings. It was a very satisfying thing to watch. Forential promised us some, Walt thought, but he never gave us any. But I guess I was wrong in thinking he was too cowardly to risk another trip to Earth for them.

Just as he reached the ladder, he whirled. The female had seen him. She had started toward him. His eyes sparkled in anticipation.

She's a Lyrian! he thought in amazement.

Damned earthmen, she thought.

No, I

For a long moment they were motionless. Then Walt, keeping a suspicious eye on her until he was above the second ceiling continued to climb.

IN the alien compartment, the gravity was so low that Walt almost floated. He propelled himself toward Forential's cubicle.

"Come in," Forential said, sensing him. Forential looked up when he entered.

"I saw a female Lyrian in the machinery room!" Walt blurted.

There was a moment of silence. Forential's face grew a shade paler. ". . . did she see you?"

Of course, Walt thought.

It was an effort for Forential to telepath in English. He preferred

vocalizing. Staring at Walt with his faceted, unblinking eyes, he thought in his own language, a language earthlings were incapable of learning: ****Lycan, you idiot! You told me the machinery room was clear! One of my charges has seen one of yours!****

****I have great regret,**** Lycan answered. ****I, I overlooked her.****

****We cannot risk the compartments discovering each other.**** Forential thought angrily.

"This is not all," Walt said. *There is one on Earth!*

Forential's tentacles stiffened. *What?* It was almost involuntary: unbelieving: terrified.

"There is one on Earth. A female."

****I have regretfully disposed of the one he saw,**** Lycan telepathed. ****Have you disposed of the one who saw her?****

****Send out a call for the Council!**** Forential broadcast hysterically. ****One more set of parents than we were aware of was exposed to our field! There is an indoctrinated mutant on Earth!****

"Are you sure?" Forential demanded of Walt.

"What about the one I saw a minute ago?" Walt persisted.

"... she came on the last ship from Lyria," Forential lied curtly.

"Oh? I would like to talk to her. We all would. Can we, Forential?"

The alien was outwardly impassive. "We'll see. Never mind her right now. Tell me about this one

on Earth."

"I heard her thoughts."

Forential lay his tentacles on his desk. They scrabbled nervously. "How long have you known?" How did she manage to break through our telepathic shielding? he wondered. He made an inward snarl of surprise

powerful mind! Then he went weak with temporary relief: Suppose we hadn't found out about her until the invasion? We had to know now while there's time! How much does she

? "Just today, for sure. Once or twice before."

Walt told Forential all he knew about Julia. He spoke quickly, and with rising excitement.

BY the time he was finished, the council had convened. The circuits were open. Forential fed them the information Walt had just given him. Their incomprehensible language crackled beyond Walt's thought range.

****We must destroy her at once.****

****Unconditioned! Unconditioned: no telling how much information she has.****

A terrified thought: ****Danger, danger, danger!****

Forential's eyes did not leave Walt's face. His thoughts were assessing the situation even under the force of the shock. The one called Julia had to be under the influence of the larger transmitter; all the mutants had been bred for that frequency. It was only years later that the ones in the smaller com-

partment had been adjusted to the other frequency. If the larger transmitter were to be shut down, then it would interrupt Lycan's training schedule for nearly a thousand mutants. But it would also render Julia an earth-normal.

"... we'll try to teleport her here," Forential said. "You have had contact with her. Can you regain it?"

"I think, yes."

"I will explain the process," Forential said.

"Yes . . . yes . . .," Walt said from time to time as he listened. He nodded his head excitedly. "I have it! I understand! I can do it!"

"You are in contact with her through the shielding? Do not think of her now. Just touch her. Can you?"

"Yes," Walt said.

"You feel the grip on her I explained?" Forential said eagerly.

"Yes!"

Now yank her!

Walt yanked.

Julia didn't budge.

"... I slipped," Walt said apologetically. Sweat glistened on his upper lip.

"Try again!" Forential ordered. "**Cut the power in the big transmitter,**" he instructed.

The aliens had been unwilling to complete their mutations. To do so would have given the mutants too much autonomy. By arranging to have the final effects dependent upon the transmission of certain fre-

quency impulses, the aliens could—in the unlikely event of difficulty with their charges—reduce them to earth-normals by the flick of a switch. It also was an arrangement necessary to their invasion plan. The aliens were careful.

It's cut.

A moment later, Walt said, "She's changed!"

(The mutants in the larger compartment had ceased to be able to hear or put their hands through walls.)

Now! Forential ordered.

A pause.

WALT let out his breath in an explosive burst. He shook his head. "It's no use. I can't."

Forential's tentacles went limp. He had known it was impossible to teleport higher life forms against their resistance; he had hoped she would have been caught off guard.

Cut the transmitter in again, Forential thought wearily.

She'll have to be killed, Lycan projected with an undertone of terror.

Send him down, Fierut, the engineer, suggested, trembling in fear. **Since he has potential knowledge of the other compartment, he will have to be destroyed anyway if he remains. Send him down to kill her.**

**We can cut off his transmitter when the main force strikes. He can't do us any harm down there

. **

"You'll have to go down and kill

her," Forential told Walt. "She is a clever, clever traitor "

"Give me the focus rod, so I can practice the death radiation with it," Walt said eagerly.

Forential answered smoothly, with scarcely an instant's hesitation; but during that time, he explored the situation and his answer was a considered one. "No, you'll have to go unarmed. We can't run the risk of premature exposure."

"Stress that," the Elder insisted.

"I can kill 'earthmen, too?'"

"Just, her," Forential said, knowing Walt would obey him. "Just her," he repeated for emphasis. "Remember that. Approach her carefully. Do not let her suspect what you intend to do. Lie to her, Walt, anything to get close to her, and then "

"I'll get a ship ready for him," Lycan thought. "And some suitable clothes."

"May I tell my mates goodbye?" Walt asked.

"Don't forget he has seen the one from the other compartment," the Elder reminded Forential sharply.

"No," Forential lied. "You haven't the time. You must leave immediately."

"Tell him much depends on him," the Elder thought.

"I can't overstress the importance of this," Forential said. He too, was trembling now as he began to see the possible implications; his tentacles quivered. His faceted eyes peered deeply into Walt's face.

"It will be a great service to Lyria and to all the people of your race."

"It is a good planet," Lycan thought. "We can't lose it now!"

"We've already begun to breed for the gravity," one of the others thought plaintively.

"By rights it should be ours."

"The air is so good, so rich "

"We can't lose it now!" Lycan insisted pathetically.

"Savages: the thought of the natives horrifies me! *Hurry Forential!*"

Forential thought to them with all the conviction he could muster: "This child of mine is very adept. He will kill her."

"The ship will have to be destroyed as soon as you land," Forential told the mutant. "That means you will have to remain until the invasion. Let me review all this again . "

Walt's hands jerked with nervous anticipation. "I understand, Forential."

"The ship is ready any time, Forential."

"Let me review this again . . .

As Walt listened, he thought; I wonder if earthmen can prevent themselves from being teleported? I hope not. I want to teleport them this way and that way, from all around me, whenever one comes close to me. It's the easiest way to kill them. It's a shame I couldn't get the one on Earth . . . She would have suddenly materialized, bloody, twisted, wrenched, turned inside out

—a beautiful corpse; that's what we should do with earthlings, and with traitors.

****Lycan: Hurry with your charges.****

****One more week, Elder. And they will be ready to attack!****

CHAPTER V

THE thing Walt first noticed was the hugeness of space around his tiny, falling ship. Through the viewplate above him—he was supine—the vast, star-set blackness seemed infinite, seemed to suck his mind out of his body until it was connected only by a tenuous thread. He had seen space from the great wheel that was dwindling behind him; but never before had its immediacy been impressed on him with such force: here, it was an intimate wrapping, clutching at him from all sides.

He had pointed out as nearly as he could determine it from brief, telepathic contact (the aliens showed him how to center on her) Julia's location on the planet. The aliens had promised to land him in an unpopulated area on the same part of the continent. The aliens' thoughts did not come through the shielding around their space station; nor did the thoughts of his compartment-mates. For the first time in his life, he was terribly alone.

Earth grew in the viewplate; expanding majestically to obliterate the surrounding space, it grew shimmering along its almost regular cir-

cumference. The orbit of his saucer-shaped ship flattened into a great spiral. The ship twisted around the Earth from shadow to light and then into shadow again as if it were attached to the loose end of a piece of string being wound up by the slowly turning planet. Gravity pressed his body, crushed him; a sudden, sickening drop left him weightless.

The aliens maneuvered his ship carefully. Walt could not—as the aliens could — be immersed in a liquid tank to make possible instantaneous changes of direction. They let him down tenderly.

Hello, Julia thought brightly.

It was frightening. Here was a Lyrian whose mind had pierced even the wheel's shielding! How could he hope to kill her?

He stared at the approaching planet, and his hands tightened beneath the pressing layers of the acceleration cocoon that enfolded him.

But I, he thought: I was able to contact her through the shielding, too. I was the only one who did; nobody else reported her. It's all right: she's no stronger than I am.

I know you're there, she thought.

I'll wait to answer, he thought; he tried to hold his mind shut.

You're traveling very fast: Much too fast!

The ship lurched a bit, slowing down. Then—for several seconds—he was as much in Calvin's mind as his own; their minds blended. The shielding did not stop that. Calvin was waiting at the foot of the ladder for him to return. *Don't wait,*

Walt thought; *I'm*—And as unexpectedly as it had commenced, the blending ceased; he was once again alone. Calvin! Calvin! he thought. No answer. Calvin's abnormal, unpredictable mind remained inaccessible.

Hello, Julia said sweetly. The complacency she conveyed, the as surity of her thought, the self confidence, the self reliance—these things troubled him.

THE ship touched ground, bounced once and was still. The switch above him flipped over with a nasty, metallic snicker. In a fever of haste, he ripped out of the cocoon. He had less than twenty seconds to get outside before the molecular reaction set in.

His feet pounded to the door; his hand found the lever; his body fell hard against the surface. The door popped open and he sprawled across the cool sand.

He was up and running.

At fifty yards he looked back panting. The ship began to glow a dull, unexciting dun color. A wave of heat pressed against his cheek. The ship folded upon itself and collapsed into a powder of dry, red rust.

The desert around him was endless; the chill of distance from which he was completely unprotected caught in his throat. He sat down and huddled up to protect himself from it. He trembled violently and whimpered for Forential. Cold sweat drenched his body.

He forced himself to stand; slow-

ly the reaction passed. He opened his eyes. He took a deep, nervous breath and let it out.

And—

He wanted to fall to the ground and dig his fingers into it.

Good God! he thought. She's trying to teleport me to her! She had caught him unaware, when the terror of the desert was still upon him. He could not marshal his thoughts to resist her.

He twisted frantically. *Watch out! You'll kill me!*

The attempt ceased at once.

oh? I thought . . . Yes, I can see now that The thought ended abruptly. There was an utter and terrifying silence from her direction.

His mind began to add up the overall situation with great speed. *Hello*. She did not answer. He licked his lips.

I wasn't, he thought, . . . *I wasn't serious when I tried to teleport you a while ago. I was just playing a joke on you. I wasn't trying to kill you.*

She seemed to be thinking the statement over. *If you had tried again, I would have let you. I didn't realize it was you at first.*

He cursed himself.

You were moving too fast a moment ago.

He was getting her position fixed. She lay west. He turned in that direction. She broke the contact.

Search planes of the Air Force began to drone over the area; searching for the saucer the radar

had tracked to earth.

WALT walked for hours across the desert. His feet, unaccustomed to the tight fitting shoes, pained him. He grew weary. Occasionally, lights from the highway to his left winked by in the night. On he trudged. Sand crept into his shoes.

Dawn came. He looked toward the mountains, blue with distance. He would not be able to make them. Soon the sun would be overhead. The heat (it was already promised) would be intense. He would have to have water. I could change the sand to water—the air—the plants, he thought. (Forential could, he told himself.) I could: If I only knew more; if I only had practice. If I could only *see* just how water is put together. Forential should have explained things like that to us.

Hello, he thought to Julia.

He received no answer.

She's suspicious, he thought. What did I do to make her suspicious? She wasn't when I first contacted her. But there was something funny about her. Maybe she knows I know she's a traitor. Forential said lie to her.

Hello, he thought. *I'm a Lyrian traitor, too.*

Julia, he thought. *Where are you?*

Damn her: she isn't going to answer.

He looked at the mountains. He was walking automatically now.

Forential has confidence in me,

he thought. Or else he'd have given me more instructions. He knows I can get there. It's up to me to do it, that's all. Well, I can't make the mountains by walking . .

He crossed to the highway; he dreaded his first contact with earth-lings.

It was a broad, gleaming band of concrete, six lanes wide with foot high rails between lanes, broken, each mile, by changeover slots.

Early morning sun cut down from the east.

Cars came by like bullets. Whirrr, whish, and they were gone.

He waved at the ones going west, but they were past him almost before he saw them. The trucks on the inner lanes were laden streaks; the car traffic on the middle one was varicolored blurs. A streamlined bus flashed silver and dwindled to a spot in the distance.

Moving more slowly, a passenger car came down the outer lane.

Walt waved desperately. Thirst was already on him.

The car squealed to a stop. He ran toward it.

IT was his first view of an earth-man. His stomach knotted with revulsion; his body shook with hatred. All his life he had been conditioned to kill them on sight.

"Where's your car?" the driver asked when he came abreast.

Walt gestured vaguely. His face contorted with the effort he made to control his hands.

"Why'n hell didn't ya radio in for a pick-up? God, man, you could die out here."

Walt said: "You let me go with you?"

"Sure . . . get in."

Walt fumbled at the side of the car.

"Push the button, you dope."

Walt pushed the button, and the door opened.

"Aintcha never seen a car before?"

Walt grunted and got in.

"You been here long?"

If he doesn't shut up, I'll strangle him, Walt thought. He closed the door and pressed against it to be as far away from the earthling as possible.

"Somebody probably saw you when they passed and radioed on you," the driver said, starting the car and flipping it on automatic. "A pick-up'll be along shortly. This will save you the fee."

Walt gritted his teeth. "Thanks."

" . . . you gotta funny accent. Where you from?"

"I don't want to talk to you," Walt said slowly. God, he thought, I wish Forential hadn't told me not to kill any of them!

The driver looked sideways at him, shrugged, and began to whistle through his teeth.

Ah, to kill him, Walt thought. To kill him! He stared at the man's heavy jowls. To rip into them . . . Wait, wait until Julia is caught, just wait . . . I want to kill her a little at a time.

Beyond the blue mountains, the driver drew the car into the checker stand.

"Got any fruit?" the California state inspector asked.

The driver climbed out and called the officer aside. They whispered. Walt twisted uncomfortably. His spine began to prickle.

The officer came over and opened Walt's door. "Get out, buddy."

"Me?"

"You. Hurry up!"

Walt's eyes darted rapidly about. He got out slowly.

"Say something!"

"I, I don't know. What do you want me to say something for?"

"It's Russian?" the driver demanded.

"Hell, I don't know. Come on buddy." The officer took Walt's arm. "There's something funny here all right."

RUSSIAN? Walt thought. What did that mean? He could tell he was in for trouble. The man's grip on his arm was uncomfortably authoritative. If I only had a focus rod, I could . . . , he thought.

His heart began to hammer. Would they use one of the terrible atom bombs to destroy him in another minute?

"Come along," the officer said.

" . . . I want a drink of water, please."

"He's been out on the desert," the driver said. "Maybe all night, from the looks of him."

"Okay," the officer said. "Let's

go over here What's your name?"

Walt walked beside him. "Walt."

"Walt what?"

"Walt."

"I mean, Walt Smith or Jones or Johnson?"

"That's it." Walt's mind raced.

"What?"

"Johnson," Walt said. "Walt Johnson?"

The officer puckered up his lips. "Okay, friend, we'll find out more about you in a little bit. Let's get your drink."

They entered the warm roadside office. The officer crossed to the cooler and drew a glass of water.

"Thanks." Walt drank thirstily. "More?"

The officer complied; as yet he had not taken his eyes off the mutant.

Holding his glass, empty for a second time, Walt glanced around the office, balancing nervously on the balls of his feet. When his eyes rested on a spot behind the officer, he said, "What's that?"

The officer turned. "What?"

Walt tried to concentrate on the invisibility projection. He started for the door.

"What?" the officer repeated, puzzled. He looked around. "I'll be damned! Now where—"

Once in the yard, Walt raced toward the check point. It was hard to hold the distortion field around himself and his clothing.

The officer was now in the yard shouting.

"He can't get far!" someone called.

A moment later a car drew up to the check point. Walt would have to pass through the steel of the door to enter it unnoticed. Steel was difficult to penetrate, particularly difficult, if he remained invisible while doing it.

He succeeded.

He settled into the rear seat.

Blood vessels strained on his forehead.

Hurry! he thought.

THE driver meshed the gears with a button just when he was wavering on the edge of visibility. An officer glanced into the car. Walt held his breath. The officer motioned the car on.

The driver, Walt saw now, was a girl. Foreential had shown him pictures of female Lyrians; and this girl—but for the fact she was an earthling—would have been beautiful. Now that he had begun to master his hate reaction, he felt the stirrings of curiosity.

He became visible.

After a mile or so, she must have heard his breathing. The car was on automatic, following the guide beam on the center of the lane. She turned. She studied him for a long moment with beautiful grey eyes.

"Hello, where did you come from?"

Walt moved his lips.

The girl was sizing him up carefully. She seemed to like what she saw. She nodded. "You got on

back there? I didn't see you."

Walt stared at her.

"You wanted a lift, that's it, isn't it?"

Walt said nothing. She wore soft perfume. If I did not hate her so much . . . he thought.

"You deaf and dumb."

" . . . no. No."

She pulled the car into a clear-lane niche.

She regarded him. "Not bad Get up front."

He obeyed her. She started the car again.

"I'm Walt Johnson."

"Where are you going, Walt Johnson?"

"This . . . down this way." The emotions were almost out of control with excitement. His thoughts were becoming powerful and diffuse.

You let her alone! Julia ordered.

It was like a slap. He quickly dampened his thoughts. Hatred returned.

The driver of the car chewed gum reflectively, watching him. She twitched nervously closer.

She saw his eyes. She stopped chewing gum. Perhaps she saw the hatred. She was trembling, suddenly. "You . . ." She drew the car into a niche again. "You better get out here."

Walt was angry. No killing, no killing, he told himself. He controlled his hands. He forced himself to open the door and get out.

"Somebody'll give you a ride," the girl said.

The car moved away, gaining

speed quickly . . .

An orchard lay behind him. Cars passed more slowly now that the desert was to the east.

Walt began to walk.

He thought: Forential told us a while ago there was a destructive war in progress. It doesn't seem like there's a war. I haven't seen any signs of it. It's peaceful. I wonder what he meant?

Within a few minutes, a car drew along side of him.

"I'm Walt Johnson. I'm going down the road."

"Get in, then."

Walt got in.

Hello, Julia, he thought. I want to see you, Julia.

CHAPTER VI

IN the space station, Forential sat in his cubicle in mental conference with the other aliens. Behind their flow of thoughts was the unREFERRED-to but ever-present fear for their own lives. Cowardice was taken for granted; it was so deeply a part of their own culture (if it wasn't somehow a racial characteristic) that it did not need to be acknowledged.

The aliens always let other races fight their wars of conquest.

Forential knew that his own personal existence might well hinge on the outcome of the next few hours. None of the aliens knew how much knowledge Julia possessed. Unlike the other mutants, she had not been kept in ignorance of the basic laws

of nature. How dangerous she might be, they could only guess. Was *she* capable of attacking them?

Forential was physically ill; he wanted to flee. If he had had a ship capable of traveling interstellar distances, he would have embarked without delay. But the huge interstellar ship of his race would not be back for another thirty years. There was no escape from the space station; there was no place to go.

And if the earthlings were not destroyed, if the invasion of Earth failed, retaliation from the planet would not be long coming. Once the Earth located the space station (and Earth would, once Earth realized its existence) even human normals would be able to destroy it—one rocket with an atomic war head would do — long before the interstellar ship returned.

Walt could not fail; the invasion could not fail.

****Let's try to make peace with the earthlings,**** one of the aliens thought. ****It's better than . . . than exposing *ourselves* to physical violence!****

****That would be suicide: once they realized what we had been planning to do to them.****

****I don't trust them.****

****Let Forential send down *all* his charges to kill the female!****

****Don't be hysterical!**** the Elder thought hysterically.

Forential knew that to send down his charges first might alert Earth to the danger of invasion: twenty-seven saucer-ships would not go un-

noticed. But even if they would, even if Earth remained unaware, such a course would completely disrupt the plan of conquest.

****She hasn't realized the menace yet,**** the Elder thought. ****Walt will kill her. Walt will kill her, won't he, Forential?*****

****Yes.**** If only one of us went to make sure, Forential thought. To help him . . . no . . . None of us would risk it. It's too dangerous.

The aliens did not have any equipment to make their single person ships invisible. It took bulky distortion machinery; the single person ships were too large to cover with mental shielding.

Twenty years ago, yes (Forential thought) we could have risked it. But now the radar screens around all the major countries are too tight. We could not, like Walt, destroy our ship. We would need it to return in.

****We must give him all the help we can,**** Forential thought.

****We must.****

****We must.****

****Lycan,**** the Elder thought. ****Can you cut the power of your charges?*****

****An extended period might have a bad psychological effect . . .****

****They won't realize the implication—that they're not Lyrians, that we control them—until too late.****

****If we could give Walt twelve hours,**** Forential thought. ****We've got to give him every chance!****

****When do you think he'll be**

close to her?" the Elder asked.

Forential consulted his maps. He calculated rapidly.

"If he travels fast—if he has luck—by another five hours."

"Lycan," the Elder instructed, "continue with training until then. We'll cut off the greater transmitter five hours from now. Twelve hours should give Walt more than enough time to kill her. It will be mutant trying to kill an earth-normal. He can't fail!"

"He can't fail," they echoed nervously.

"Will twelve hours be enough?"

"If he does, somehow, fail, we can't risk delaying the invasion more than that."

"I will see that it doesn't delay the invasion," Lycan promised. "I'll train them right through normalcy."

WALT had arrived in Hollywood. *Wait for me there.* Julia (dressing carefully) projected to him. *I'll be right over to get you.*

She finished combing her hair. She went to her handbag, snapped it closed decisively, and slipped it over her arm. She was smiling.

On her way out of the room, she picked up the book on brain surgery that she hadn't yet had the chance to read. She skimmed through it in the taxi on the way to pick Walt up.

She paused a fraction of a second over one of the illustrations; in that time, she was able to memorize

it. My brain, she thought, is different right there; but I can't see my own brain well enough to tell much; I want to look at his for a minute if I can.

Having finished the book, she held it primly in her lap, tapping impatiently on it with her fingers.

There's a lot of things funny about this boy, she thought. I've got to get more information about him. I've got a suspicion he's going to be in for a few surprises.

(It was less than an hour before the aliens would cut off the larger transmitter.)

When I first located him for sure, she thought, he was traveling *much* too fast; faster and higher than any experimental rocket I've ever heard of.

I've got to check on the old flying saucer reports, she thought. They're the only things I can remember reading about that were supposed to move that fast.

"This is him waiting up here," Julia said to the driver. "Just pull over to the curb."

A moment later, opening the door, she said, "Get in. I'm Julia."

"I'm Walt Johnson," he said, flexing his hands. "Let's go someplace where we can be alone."

"Well," she said. "It's good to see you, Walt." She extended her hand.

He had sealed off his thoughts. His hand was moist in hers; it responded uncertainly to her warm pressure. She drew him inside. She caught a wisp of thought that

he was not quite able to conceal. "Back to the hotel," she told the driver.

Now I'm *sure*, she thought, that he really tried to teleport me out of my hotel room. I wonder why he wanted to? Why should he want to kill me?

I'll have to keep an eye on him. But he's such a baby. He can't even control his emotions.

"Your clothing," she said, studying him with professional concern, "is all wrong. We'll just have to get some more. Some to fit your personality better. I'll do that tomorrow."

Anger crossed his face. He rubbed his hand over his knee and looked down at his trousers. "I like them," he said in a surly voice.

She was not afraid of him. She had no need to be. He was such an innocent!

Why, she thought, he doesn't seem to have any information to draw on hardly at all; he'll be harmless as long as I wish him so.

"I'm a Lyrian traitor, too," he said.

"You are?"

His accent. She could not remember any accent on Earth like that. He had not learned his English from an earthman. A Lyrian had taught him?

"What are you doing here?" he said.

Boy! she thought. Is his conversation naive! Keep him talking, girl!

She studied his face. She thought: Get 'em young and raise 'em to suit

yourself, Julia.

SHE added up the facts she had already discovered. He was, like herself, a human mutant. (I must check, she thought, to see if there were any human babies missing during the last flying saucer scare twenty-four years ago, the year I was born.) The mutants had been collected at birth, but the collectors had overlooked her. Walt had traveled here from (where? Mars? Luna?) in order to rectify this oversight by putting her out of the way. Why? Obviously he owed allegiance to the collectors (Lyrians?) from whom he had probably learned—among other things—his atrocious accent. He was—

She had ignored his question, so he asked another one. "Where is the war?"

"War? Julia repeated. She frowned delicately. "There's no war. Not right now. The international situation is getting better, I think." War? she asked herself. He's got a lot of misinformation about us.

She kept trying to *see* into the physical structure of his brain. Ah, she thought, yes. Right there—

A bridge there, all right.

It's probably an easy mutation, she thought. Probably latent in everyone's genes. The next development of man? (But how many centuries will it take for it to come out again?) How did the collectors produce the mutation in the first place—assuming they did produce (as well as harvest) it?

Could, she thought, a surgeon—operate, as it were—on an adult brain to produce the bridge? . . . I'll have to take up surgery. A few months to learn technique. I think I could. It's easy to heal, because of the subconscious pattern (the cellular pattern?) but, to—operate—to change—to build into a different structure, so that would require experiments and study, perhaps actual knife work . . .

"There *has* to be a war," Walt said. "Forential told us there was."

"There isn't. Not now." Forential? A non-human? An alien?

"He told us," Walt said.

"He lied," Julia said.

"He doesn't lie."

Julia shrugged. Walt is a loyal follower, she thought. "There's no war. Maybe he meant there would be one shortly; maybe it was a premature announcement." Lord! do these aliens have some way of prodding the Russian bear? she thought. Or how the devil are they—Forentials, wherever they are—thinking of starting a war?

Walt refused to consider her denial. He did not look her in the face. "I like you," he said. He was desperate to change the subject. "Your smile. You're so . . . so . . . nice." He thought the last word; he took the risk that she might peep his other thoughts. He was almost certain she could not; he hoped to peep hers if she thought a reply. Forential couldn't be a liar!

Julia knew they were both incorrect: his statement and his conviction.

But she liked to hear him say he liked her. I guess, she thought, he's trying to lull my suspicions. Maybe I better lull his, too . . .

She smiled sweetly.

"You see, I've never seen a Lyrian female before," Walt said. " . . . except one on the ship just the other day; but just one, before."

Is Lyria supposed to be a *planet*? she thought to herself. "You've never been to Lyria, then, have you?"

" . . . we were very young when we left."

He doesn't even know he's a native of Earth! Julia thought. "You know," she said, "I'll bet I know more about you than you think I do."

That brought a fear reaction from Walt.

You don't need to be afraid of me, Julia thought soothingly.

(She had scarcely half an hour left before the aliens shut off the big transmitter.)

"How soon . . . When will we get to the hotel?"

"Soon, now," Julia said.

"We'll be alone?" Walt said.

"We'll have a chance to talk; there are a lot of things for us to talk about."

"Yes," he said. He began to rub his hands over one another. His growing excitement and his hatred bubbled just below the surface of his mind; Julia could feel the emotions without him being aware that she could.

My, she thought. He's going to take a lot of re-educating before he

makes a very good husband.

WHEN they entered the hotel room, Walt found his throat expanding with excitement.

Forential, he thought, will be pleased that I have killed her in secret. No one on Earth will ever know who she was killed by. When she is dead, I can slip out of the hotel and . . . and invisible, I can steal food and drink and stay in empty rooms until the invasion comes; and when it does, then I can start teleporting earthlings and slaying them with my hands, and . . . She doesn't suspect, he thought, that I am going to kill her in just a moment.

He complimented himself on how cleverly he had concealed his intentions.

Covertly he surveyed the room. The pitcher on the table? The chair? What with? A sudden numbing blow—like the blow Calvin delivered to John. Then, afterwards, hands, knees, fingers—and she will be dead.

He saw himself rising triumphant from her still body. Saw Forential (when, later, he heard of it) smiling approval, saw his mates listening awe struck . . . His breath trembled in his throat; his arms ached to be moving.

"Won't you sit down?" she said.

I will wait until she is off guard, he thought. Smiling in anticipation, he sat down.

. . . she doesn't, he thought, seem like a traitor. Such bright, clear eyes. She seems so nice, so trust-

ing, so innocent. It was foolish to have been afraid of meeting her. She's small and harmless. I wish she weren't a traitor; maybe—

But Forential knows.

(How about the war? Why did Forential say there was a war?)

Forential knows. He said to kill her.

Julia, studying him with faint amusement, said, "Have you looked at your brain? I have a picture of a human brain here. I want to show you how alike they are."

"Lyrians have a superficial resemblance to earthlings."

"Look at this. Very similar. The same, almost."

Walt shifted uneasily. Her eyes did not move from his face. What was she getting at?

"I wonder," she said, "why we

Lyrians have had certain powers given to us just recently? Why, before, we were no different than earthlings?"

Walt frowned. He didn't want to think about it. He had a job to do.

"There's a—call it—a bridge in our minds. It's just recently been closed."

(It was ten minutes before the larger transmitter was to be turned off for twelve hours.)

Walt decided on the pitcher. The answer to her question was suddenly obvious. "That means we're ready to invade."

She watched him very closely. Her fingers tapped her knee. ". . . you said you were on a ship?"

It's almost time to kill her, he thought. I'm sorry, he wanted to say: but I really must. "Yes. A space station."

"How many of you are there?"

"Twenty-seven; twenty-eight, counting me."

"That's not many. Not enough." She bent forward. "You said you saw a Lyrian female on the ship. I think there's another group of Lyrians on the ship. I think they're going to invade first. That's the war your group is supposed to come in on the end of. You're going to be used as a clean-up group."

"Forential would have told us," Walt said.

"The question is: *Why didn't he tell you?*"

Walt realized how terribly shy and dangerous she was. She was too smart to be harmless. Suppose she should warn—but who could she warn? Earthlings? Could they get their atom bombs ready?

He felt his skin prickle. *Look behind you!* he thought to her. It had worked with the officer; it worked with her.

She turned.

Savagely, he grasped the pitcher with the mental fingers of telepor-tation. He hurled it as hard as he could at the back of her head.

JULIA was ready for the blow. She had the molecules of the pitcher displaced before it was half way to her. It passed through her body easily and smashed against the far wall.

She turned quickly enough to avoid Walt's rush.

On her feet now, she wavered into partial displacement.

Snarling harshly, he advanced on her.

(There was less than five minutes remaining. One of the aliens hovered at the larger transmitter.)

He tried to grab her. His hand passed through her body.

She smiled.

He tried to adjust to her level of displacement. He choked. Quickly he realized what was wrong; he rectified the air so he could breathe. She changed to normal just as he sprang. He hurtled through her as through the air itself.

She turned to face him. He was panting. "When I was a kid," she said, "I used to throw rocks when I got mad."

Damn you! His fists clenched. He towered over her.

She did not have any more time to waste with him. 'That means,' he had said, 'we're ready to invade.'

How much time did she have? The full extent of the menace was gradually taking form in her mind. With an army of indoctrinated mutants. Invasion! Murder! Destruction! For an instant she wanted to collapse and cry like a frightened little girl.

What am I going to do? what am I going to do? what am I going to do? she thought frantically.

I've got to see someone! I've got to convince someone—I've got to show people my mutant powers:

they'll have to believe me! The President, the Army

How much time?

She made a distortion field. Invisible, she rushed to the door. She paused, returned for her handbag. Holding it, she passed through the door.

I haven't got time to beat reason into his head, she thought. I'll tend to him later.

Half way down the stairs, she suddenly became visible. *

CHAPTER VII

OH, *damn!* she thought. This happened once before. How long will it last this time?

A great chill exploded in her body.

suppose—?

Now she ran in earnest. Her legs moved like pistons. The few patrons in the lobby glanced up in disapproval. At the door she almost bowled over a young man with a brown sack full of quarts of beer.

Once in the street, she stopped and darted frightened glances about her. It was growing dark. Neon winked. The street was unnatural and brittle under the artificial lights. Well dressed women, serious and unsmiling (serenely confident that they were being mistaken for movie stars) walked beside athletic escorts; sales girls and office clerks window shopped intently.

At the curb Julia almost danced with nervousness.

He can come upon me invisible!

she thought. He can throw things! He can—! *I can't even tell when he's near me!*

She waved desperately for a cab.

"Cab! Cab! Taxi!"

It receded toward Vine Street.

Even now he's coming out of the hotel! she thought. Or he sees me from the window! I can't wait here; I'll have to run; I'll

A chartreuse convertible with its top up drew to a stop in front of her. The driver opened the door by pressing a button on the dash. The upholstery was made of tiger skin. He smiled nervously. "Going down this way?"

She hesitated only an instant. "My God, yes!" she said.

"Get in."

She got in and slammed the door. "Let's go! mister."

"When you're in a hurry, these cabs you never can find one."

He wore a sports jacket, most of which was canary yellow. He had thin, delicate hands; his face was lean and sunless; his eyes were sad and misunderstood. The hands threaded the convertible into traffic.

Julia fidgeted. She kept glancing behind her.

"Somebody following you?"

Julia shuddered. "I hope not."

The driver waited. Julia did not amplify; she was half turned now, so she could see out the rear window.

"I had to talk to someone," the driver said apologetically. "I was driving along, and suddenly I had

to talk to someone. You know how it is? . . . Then there you were; you seemed in such a hurry."

"I'm sure glad you stopped, mister!"

"I mean," the driver said intently, "I get wanting to *talk*. My name's Green. You may have heard of me. I produce pictures—motion pictures. I'm a producer."

How can I ever get away from Walt! Julia thought. He can run me down whenever he wants to!

"Nobody hears of producers," the driver said. "That's all right with me. Let other people take the credit. I don't like to call attention to myself." He brought out a monogrammed cigarette case and flicked it open. "Cigarette?"

"No, no, thank you." Julia twisted at the strap of her handbag.

"Who can you talk to, I mean really? All *they're* after is your money . . . I'll tell you what I really want. I want a farm—no, don't laugh: it's the truth—a little piece of land. I want to settle down, you know. Most people don't understand how it is." He gazed sadly down Hollywood Boulevard. "To be famous, I mean."

JULIA was scarcely listening. She bit her lip.

"My wife, now, she's an actress. In her next picture, she opens a beer can with her teeth. Not a bottle; anyone can open a bottle. She doesn't understand me. She's an actress." One of his delicate hands moved over the tiger skin

toward Julia. "I'd like—sometimes to get away. Go away for a week-end. Some place where they'd never heard of A. P. Green, the big producer. You know. I wish—I honestly wish I weren't — some times."

The hand touched Julia's dress. She was too preoccupied to notice.

" . . . you have an interesting face. It's very, very expressive. I want to give you my card. I want you to come in for a test."

Julia moved away from him. All she could think about was Walt. Could he be in that car just behind? " . . . please . . .," she said vaguely in protest.

He blinked his eyes; the hand retreated a few inches. "I've never talked to anyone like this before," he said. "But your face, your eyes . . . When I saw you standing there—saw you were running from something — I knew you'd understand."

Julia swallowed stiffly. She pivoted to face him. "Listen mister. I need help. Would you drive me into L. A.? Fast, mister?"

He was hurt. He drew back. "I thought we could go . . . I know a little place . . . They know me there; we could eat, and—" He moved one hand pathetically.

Julia felt a flutter of thought. (There was still a tiny bit of residual power remaining; it was fading fast.) Walt was starting after her!

"Mister, for God's sake, *can you drive me into L. A.?* I've got to

get some money out of the all-night bank!"

" . . . yes, of course, yes." He moved his lips without words. "I thought you'd understand. Your face . . . Nobody does, really. How it is, I mean."

"Please hurry," she said. If I can just get a car before Walt catches me, she thought. That's the only way I can keep away from him. I've got to keep moving until I get my powers back; or until . . . until . . . what? Her lower lip trembled. She was cold and numb. *Hurry!* she wanted to shriek.

FOR a full minute Walt did not realize she was gone. When he did, he was relieved. He found himself trembling. Where did that demon go? Thank God she's gone; I—!

The thought of her, diminutive and infinitely superior, made him cringe. He was afraid of her. He wanted to cry.

Forential understands, Walt thought. If he were here now, he'd understand. He'd he'd tell me what to do.

Walt stared at the back of his hand.

Steady, he thought, steady. Try to relax. The shock it's not fair . . . she knows so much

Study the room; think of something else. The ship; I'd like to see Calvin's face again . . . There's my face—in the mirror. It looks all right.

Forential will be angry. I should-

..n't have let her get away. I should have—what should I have done? Could I have?

I could have . . .

He shook his head. No: that wouldn't have fooled her either.

Forential, what am I going to do now?

Walt sat down. He tried to think things out. I'm no good, he thought. The only thing I'm good for is to kill earthlings. I ought to be ashamed of myself.

. . . I'm alone, he thought. Things are going all wrong.

I've I've got to learn to depend on myself.

I've always depended too much on Forential.

I've always been told what to do, he thought. It's time for me to begin telling myself what to do.

He nodded his head at the truth of this. I'm on my own, he thought. Well, by God, it's time to face that! I'll stop her some way.

Forential is depending on me!

At last it occurred to him to try to locate Julia. He concentrated. He formed Julia's pattern in his mind. He sought to equate it with reality. For a moment of bleak despair, he felt nothing. Then the pattern and reality overlapped. He fixed her in space. He had her. She was fleeing in an automobile.

And—she had changed! She was now—as she had been once before—as impotent as an earthling.

He sprang to his feet. Elation filled him. A rising tide of confidence swept over him.

Damn, damn, damn! he thought in excited delight. She's mine now!

Julia, oh Julia, can you hear me?

She couldn't.

He could feel her fleeing.

I'll show her now, he thought with savage satisfaction.

Wait'll I catch you!

There'll be no nonsense about privacy this time! he promised himself. I'll kill her where ever I find her. Forential may not like it as well as—to hell with Forential!

OUTSIDE the hotel, in the crisp, fresh night air, Walt plunged into the crowd emptying from a theater, whose marquee, "Junkeroo", flashed lonesomely above the sidewalk.

I'll need a car to overtake her, he thought.

He remembered back to his first ride. I can operate one, he thought, if I can start it. It's easy.

Julia lies in that direction. I'll catch her in no time.

He heard a car door open behind him.

He spun on his heel and walked back to the car. The driver, settled behind the wheel, was just depressing the light stud when Walt cut in front of it and came abreast of the driver's side.

"You're the one I'm looking for," he said.

"Eh?"

"Move over!"

The owner was a heavy, middle aged man; he snorted and narrowed his eyes. "What's this baloney?"

"I'm taking this car."

"The hell you say!"

Walt pulled the door open, grabbed the man by the shirt and twisted. He set his feet and the man came sprawling out into the street.

Holding him, Walt slapped his face.

The man flailed wildly. He tried to jerk loose. His shoulders twisted. He tried with a knee, and Walt threw him to the pavement. A few startled passers-by turned to watch.

Walt picked the man up and thrust him into the car. The man's face was purple with rage. He tried to scream.

Walt displaced the air from his lungs. The man collapsed, gagging.

"Don't make any loud noises," Walt said.

The man choked and gasped with suddenly restored breath.

" . . . what . . . what do you want?"

"How do you start this car?"

The man started to protest; the look on Walt's face made him think better of it. He told Walt how to start the car.

Walt followed instructions. He listened to the purr of the motor.

"What is the power? What makes it run?"

THE owner wiped blood from his face. Sullenly, through swelling lips, he said, " . . . it's a combustion engine . . . like all cars . . ."

Cautiously maneuvering the car into traffic, Walt said, "Tell me what you know about combustion engines."

Walt displaced air again. He put it back. "I asked you to tell me what you know about combustion engines."

The man kept dabbing at his lips.

Gasping, the man began to explain. He did not seem too sure of himself. Every other sentence, he faltered, and Walt had to prompt him sharply.

"This fuel . . . this gas . . . When the supply is used up, how does one obtain more?"

"From a . . . gas station . . ."

I'll have to watch the fuel supply, Walt thought.

"They're . . . they're on nearly every corner," the man said.

Walt nodded. I've got all I can from him, he thought. "Do you have a small, heavy object?"

The man licked his cut lip. His eyes were wide with terror. "Y—ye—yes."

"Produce it!"

The man brought out a cigarette lighter.

Teleporting, Walt jerked it from the man's hand and hit him behind the ear with it. With a sigh, the owner collapsed unconscious.

I'm doing all right, Walt thought. Now, if I can just find the right road to follow.

He concentrated on Julia.

He began to drive very fast, slipping in and out of traffic recklessly.

Six blocks later, he picked up the police car.

And three blocks after that, the police car was abreast of him, forc-

ing him to the curb.

Annoyed, Walt brought the car to a stop. The police car angled in ahead of him. Walt waited confidently.

"Okay," the policeman said wearily, taking out his book of tickets and putting one foot on the running board. "Where's the fire?"

Walt said, "Fire?"

"Yeah. The speed limit in this town is thirty miles an hour. Where's the fire? Let's see your license."

Walt considered this information. He removed the air from this policeman's lungs; from the lungs of the policeman in the car. When they were very unconscious, he let them have air again. He experimented with a few buttons until he found the reverse. He backed up a few yards, circled out around the police car, and continued. The policemen were still unconscious.

MR. Green, the producer, stopped in front of the bank. With hurried thanks, Julia scrambled out.

Pathetically he called after her: "But we could—"

Inside the revolving doors, she pattered across the inlaid floor to the teller's cage still open for business. If I can just get out of here alive! she thought. The high, vaulted ceiling—dim and shadowy above the cool lights—seemed to echo her thoughts: get out of here alive, get out alive, alive.

She gave her name crisply and fumbled in her handbag for identification.

"I want to withdraw my money."

"Yes, Miss. Your account is with this branch?"

"Yes." She handed her identification and her check book to him.

While she twisted nervously, he phoned to verify her account.

She could feel Walt creeping up on her. Her skin crawled. The revolving door was motionless.

That meant nothing. He could walk *through* it.

There was no easy way of telling how he would strike until the last moment. It would be so swift that she would never feel the blow at all.

She stared, fascinated, at the ink well across the room. She imagined it suddenly ripped out and hurled at her. She shivered. She tried to teleport it herself.

It did not move.

Cold sweat began to ooze from her pores. Brakes squealed in the street outside. She ran her hands along the carrying strap of her handbag. Her mouth was dry.

I'm too scared to spit! she thought. I've heard of that. I didn't believe it. It's true.

"For God's sake, hurry!"

"Yes, Miss," the teller said. He eyed her suspiciously.

How long can this go on? she thought despairingly. He'll be here in another minute!

"I have the amount. It's the same as your check stub shows," the teller said. "You want it all?"

"Yes."

"Just take this over to the table, there, and fill it in."

Oh, God! she thought.

She crossed to the table. Her hand was shaking. The free pen blotted. She ripped out the check and crumpled it into a ball. Her breathing was shallow. She found her own pen. Shakily she filled in another check.

The teller looked at it. He waved it dry. He held it up. "Just a moment, Miss. I'd like to verify the signature."

Her nails dug into her palms. She moved her feet uneasily. She glanced toward the door.

She fumbled in her handbag for a cigarette. She found a stale pack, shook one out. She lit it with a safety match and extinguished the match with a nervous flick of her arm. She inhaled.

The invasion. For the first time since she'd left the hotel it reoccurred to her.

Oh, Lord! she thought. How much time before that! She dropped her cigarette and ground it out.

The clerk was bending over, comparing signatures.

I've got to do something about the invasion! I've got to tell somebody! But but how can I ever convince anyone?

They'd think I was crazy. They'd detain me for questioning. They'd lock me up. If they did, he could come upon me and I couldn't even run!

Her face was bloodless. If I had my powers back

She began to pace. Two steps one way; two steps back; two steps

the other way.

I could . . . I could show them how to operate on a human to make the bridge; I could talk to a surgeon . . .

Could I?

Her mind was fuzzy. It was no longer easy to remember. So many compartments were no longer available.

Do I remember how? You you . . . She concentrated with every fiber of her being.

"Your signature is shakey," the clerk said.

She whirled on him. Her lips trembled. She choked back hot words.

"I'm upset tonight," she said weakly.

He grunted.

If he catches me, she thought, I'll be dead. He'll kill me! I'll never be able to convince anyone then!

Hurry, hurry, hurry!

"How do you want the money?" the clerk asked.

"Any way! Any way!"

He began to count bills.

If I stand still, he'll catch me! she moaned to herself. Even now . . .

She glanced toward the door.

"There," the clerk said.

Trembling, she stuffed bills into her handbag. She raced for the entrance.

SHE burst from the revolving doors. She cried out to the taxi idling across the street. The

driver started the motor. She ran across the street to the car.

"Take me to a car lot that's open!"

"Yes, Lady."

She fumbled out a bill and threw it at him. She settled back in the seat. "Hurry!"

He looked at the bill. "*Yes, indeed.*" He started the car. "I sure will."

The cab whirled away and U-turned toward Vermont.

She felt better to be moving.

And ten minutes later she was arguing with a salesman.

"This will do," she insisted. "I don't want a triple-guarantee, a road test, a service check, a—"

"I'll have to make out a bill of sale."

"All I want to know is: Is the gas tank full?"

Indignantly, the salesman said: "Of course."

"Mail me the bill of sale! Tear it up! I don't care! Here—Here's my hotel." After thrusting the card on him, she began to count money.

"The keys are in the ignition. I'll get your extra set. The license —" He began to recount the money.

She got behind the wheel, snapped on the lights, pressed the ignition button. The motor coughed and roared.

She spun the car out of the lot. She was weak with relief.

Maybe I can outrun him!
I hope.

I've got to!

I'll get as far away as I can. Then I'll . . . I'll have to take a chance waiting for an airplane. Then then . . . when my money gives out . . .

I can't hope to run forever.

She shuddered..

WALT crawled out of the wreck. It seemed to be a miracle he was unhurt.

He had switched the car to automatic drive as he had seen the driver on the desert do; he had not known that there was no automatic-drive beam on that particular stretch of highway.

At the first curve—in a heart beat of time; too fast for him to avert it—the car had hurtled the road and plowed into the embankment.

Walt cursed and shook his head and closed his eyes tightly, gathering his thoughts.

A few minutes later a car with intensely bright headlights stopped to give assistance. Walt threw the driver out and slipped behind the wheel.

In a moment he knew that he had a powerful motor under him.

CHAPTER VIII

AN hour later (two of the twelve hours were gone) Julia was still free. She had weaved and twisted across the city. She had crossed and recrossed the super-highways and the local speedways. She had fled up ramps and through under

passes.

She had no way of telling how near Walt was; or what moment and from what direction death might strike. She did not believe that he could reach out through space to snatch her life; if he tried teleportation, she was steeled to resist. The lifeless, glittering windows, the dull glare of overhead and curb lights, the shuttle movement of traffic, the heavy, motionless air—all these combined into bristling menace. Her foot strained against the accelerator; her muscles ached over the wheel.

She hoped she had confused him. Now she streaked for the open highway. She settled the car into a traffic slot on the north-bound coast super-highway. She switched the car on automatic and tried to relax.

The road curved gently toward the west to pick up the coast line. Soon the moonlit breakers hissed on white sand beaches. The ocean lay dark and mysterious toward the far horizon.

She prayed that Walt would not guess for long minutes that she had left the city; that he would lose more precious minutes locating the super-highway.

San Francisco was six hours ahead of her.

WALT was continually losing himself in a maze of Los Angeles streets. Ones that seemed to promise to deliver him cross-town to interrupt Julia in her erratic course twined away in improper di-

rections. Occasionally he neared her. But she darted away each time: as if with the primeval instinct of a hunted animal.

At last he stopped the car and cried to a pedestrian across the street: "Is there any place I can get a map of the city?"

"Ask inna filling station."

Walt snarled. And five minutes later he found the map. He memorized it carefully; it required scarcely more than a minute. During that time, he let his body rest and relax. He threw the map onto the driveway. He grew increasingly more confident of catching her as the information settled into his brain. He visualized the map.

He was ready for her now.

She was already on the super-highway. He left the filling station. He was in no hurry. He was waiting for her to return.

It soon became apparent that she would not.

He grunted and spun his car in her direction.

He lost several minutes in a traffic jam downtown. He got on the wrong lane in a clover leaf beyond the city limits. He had now passed beyond the boundaries of the map he had memorized. He took the ridge super-highway instead of the one Julia had taken. After twenty miles, he realized his mistake and had to cut over. He bounced along an east-west road that was so rough-surfaced he had to reduce his speed.

When he finally arrived on the proper highway he was almost an

hour behind Julia.

He concentrated on understanding the physical assembly of the engine in front of him. He could teleport parts from it; he could hold other parts more tightly together by using the same power. But the engine was so very complex. There was (he could tell) something there—in the engine itself—that kept the power from being utilized. He could not locate the block.

He increased the speed by tightening the valves. But the required concentration was too great to be long maintained. It exhausted him and forced him to rest for a few miles. Then he tightened the valves again. The car moved forward in a sudden burst of speed.

IN San Francisco Julia stopped long enough for a sandwich—long enough to gulp hot coffee—long enough to buy a box of "Wide-awakes." She checked airline schedules by phone.

The eastern flights were held up by weather over the Rockies. The next strato-jet to Hawaii was due to leave in thirty minutes; but she would have to wait to see if any reservations were canceled before she could be assured of a seat. There would not be another plane south for an hour and a half. One was leaving just then.

She told herself that the airport would become a cul-de-sac unless she could time it perfectly; she could not risk it.

She cruised the city until she had

been there over an hour. She was lousy and exhausted.

She was afraid to remain any longer. He might head her off; he might trap her in a dead end street. Once on the straight of way, there was—at least—no danger of that. She left the city and headed north again.

WALT arrived ten minutes before she left. He came to a stop at an all night lunch. Invisible, he slipped through walls into the kitchen. He stole food, returned to his car with it, ate it. He drove to a gas station, keeping her position sharply in mind.

"Gas," he ordered the attendant.

The attendant began filling the tank.

"All the way full," Walt said. "I want a map of the city when you finish."

The attendant brought the map. Walt unfolded it.

Julia had left the city. Walt was not going to be fooled this time. But he wanted to memorize the city just in case she did double back.

"Is there a larger map? Of this whole area?"

The attendant brought him a California map. He memorized that one. He picked out Julia's route. He verified it.

"Pay up, now," the attendant said. "I gotta car waitin'. It's five sixty-seven altogether."

Walt reached through the rolled down window and seized the man. He jerked him forward and down;

and, with the same motion, slammed his own weight against the inside of the unlocked door. The steel top of the opening door cracked the attendant across the forehead; he went limp. Walt let go of him, closed the door, and drove off.

By the time he sighted her car ahead of him on the highway, in the mist and fog of dawn, nearly eleven hours had elapsed since he had begun the pursuit. It had been only a half an hour before that he had located the governor and teleported it out of the engine.

CHAPTER IX

JULIA saw the bright lights behind her. They blinded her in the rear-view mirror until she knocked the mirror out of focus. She glanced at the speedometer. She was going as fast as the engine would permit.

She was weary from the beat of the motor and the ache of steady driving. Her body was drained of energy. The "Wide-awakes" seemed to be losing their effect. In spite of herself, she nodded. Too tired to think of anything else, she was thinking—almost dreaming, almost in half-slumber—of a steamy bath; of perfumed heat caressing her body; of soft, restful water lapping at her thighs.

Even the prospect of invasion had receded into some dim, dumb corner of her mind; it no longer concerned her. The demands of personal survival had pushed it aside;

personal survival and the knowledge of her own incapacity to prevent, forestall, or counter it. And at last exhaustion had overcome even the demands of survival.

The brilliant lights behind began to pain upon her fatigue-soaked eyeballs. They shimmered in the windshield; they—

She realized they were gaining on her.

A car without a governor.

A crazy, reckless driver.

Walt!

Suddenly the fatigue vanished. Fear alerted her. She stiffened. Her heart pounded. She glanced behind her, squinting.

There was a sickening wrench at her body; she felt herself twisting, being sucked out of space.

Teleportation!

She grabbed the wheel. She was almost too weak to resist. She fought off the terrible, insistent fingers, she shrank away from them; she moaned.

Walt ceased the effort.

She was limp. She struggled to marshal her resources. Her will was not yet depleted so much that she could not fight back.

She concentrated on being where she was, in the car, on the highway. She felt a futile but exhilarating surge of victory.

Her hand trembled when she switched off the automatic-drive. The wheel under her hands began to vibrate. The car was sensitive to her control. It was alive and deadly and hurtling like a rocket.

I can't outrun him now! she thought. He has too much speed!

I've got to get off the highway. I've got to take a side road toward the mountain. There'll be curves and twists and turns. They will cut his speed down. Maybe I can out drive him.

Side roads slipped by to her right and left.

She prepared to brake the car for the next cut-off slot.

It appeared far ahead; a dark slit on the left outlined by her rushing headlights.

She depressed the brake; the tires screamed.

The car skittered and fishtailed. She clung desperately to the wheel, battling the great chunk of metal with every ounce of her tiny body.

And somehow the car hurtled through the slot, across the other half of the highway, onto the hard topped, farm-to-market road that climbed toward the distant crest.

Walt's car, braking shrilly, hurtled past her and was lost in the night.

Julia stamped the accelerator viciously. Her car plunged forward.

Lonely trees and brush stood like decaying phantoms in the splatter of her headlights. Far ahead, winking down the mountain, she saw the headlights of another car—crawling toward her slowly, like twin fire flies, indolent after a night of pleasure. The road was pitted, and the car beneath her jolted.

It was then in the loneliness of the seldom traveled farm road that

she noticed the gasoline gauge.

The gas remaining in the tank could not be sufficient to take her another ten miles. The peg rested solidly on the empty mark to the left.

She began to cry.

THE tears almost blinded her; she jerked the car back, just in time, from a ditch. She held it toward the fearful darkness ahead. Dawn that purpled the east seemed lost forever from this road and this life.

The road climbed slowly; then steeply.

Behind her now the bright lights like great flames crept closer, burning everything. The lights had pursued her for only half an hour; it seemed an eternity. The road began a great bend around the first sharp thrust of mountain. She slowed.

The headlights were gaining.

She wanted to give up.

The motor coughed.

Walt was almost upon her; elation throbbed in his being. He had been driving on manual; he dared not risk automatic-drive, not since his wreck. He was not quite as alert as he might have been. The strain was beginning to slow his reactions.

The curve was sharper; ahead, a hair-pin turn. Walt swung out to pass her and force her to stop or plunge over the side into the deepening valley. It was the maneuver he had seen the policemen perform.

The headlights of the early farmer with a heavy load of milk suddenly exploded at the curve.

Julia gasped and slammed on her brakes.

Walt jerked his eyes from Julia's car an instant before the crash.

"CRAZY God damned fool," the farmer said as he crawled painfully from the wreckage of his pickup truck. "Crazy God damned fool!" He clutched at his arm; it was broken and bleeding. "Passing on a curve! God damned fool, passing on a curve!"

Julia had stopped her car. She ran toward the two wrecks.

"Any kid knows better, any two year old kid," the farmer said; he stared, unbelieving, at his arm. He sat down and was sick.

It was growing lighter. Mist lay over the valley. The air was damp with fading night.

Julia's feet made harsh clicks on the road.

At Walt's car she stopped. The farmer watched her with mute pain behind his eyes.

Reaction set in. She thought she was going to be sick, herself. She leaned against the wrecked car.

"We better get him out," the farmer said dully.

Julia nodded.

Between the two of them, they forced the door open and lifted Walt out to the pavement.

"Easy," the farmer said.

Julia stood over Walt's limp body. His jaw was broken and twisted to

one side. His chest was bloody; blood trickled from his nose; his hair was matted with blood.

"He's still breathing," the farmer said hoarsely.

He looks so boyish, she thought. I can't believe . . . he doesn't seem a killer. I hate whoever made a killer out of him.

Walt's chest rose and fell; his breath entered his body in tremulous gasps.

She wanted to bathe his face with cool water and rest his head on her lap. She wanted to ease his pain.

She turned away.

In the tool compartment of the wreck she located a tire iron. She brought it back.

Her hand was slippery around the icy metal.

He's dying anyway, she thought. It doesn't have to be my hand that kills him. Tears formed in her eyes.

Walt moaned.

Julia's hand tightened on the tire iron.

But the risk she thought: if he should wake up and heal himself he'll kill me. The world will never be warned of the invasion, then. It's his life against the world; his life against a billion lives.

SHE lifted the tire iron. She averted her eyes as she got ready to swing it savagely at his unprotected skull.

Cursing, the farmer reached out with his good hand and grabbed her upraised wrist. "My God, what are

you trying to do?"

"I've . . . I've got to kill him."

The farmer stepped between her and Walt.

"I've got to."

"Not while I'm here, Miss, you don't."

"Listen—!" she began. Then hopelessly, she let the arm holding the tire iron fall limply to her side. He wouldn't believe me if I told him, she thought.

Nobody will believe me; not a person on the planet. It's too fantastic: an invasion of earth. I've got to have some sort of proof to make them believe me.

No proof.

I can't let Walt die! she thought. He's the only proof I have. He's the only one who can convince anyone of the invasion.

He's got to live! she thought. I've got to get him to a hospital.

Walt's face was bloodless.

" . . . he's dying," the farmer said.

"But he can't die!" Julia cried desperately. "He can't die!"

"You're crazy," the farmer said evenly. "First you get ready to brain him with a tire iron and then you say he's got to live. Lady, if I hadn't stopped you when I did, he'd be dead as hell right now."

"I wasn't thinking; I didn't realize . . ."

Breath rattled in Walt's throat.

"Gas . . . I'm out of gas," Julia said.

She ran to the wrecked truck. She jerked a milk can upright. She

unscrewed the cap and emptied milk on the pavement.

With the tire iron she split the gas tank and caught as much of the sharp-smelling fluid as she could in the emptied can.

It sloshed loudly as she raced to her car with it. She fumbled the gas tank cap off. She was trembling so badly that she spilled almost as much as she poured into the opening. When the gas was all gone, she threw the milk can from her.

"I'll back up!" she cried to the farmer. "You'll have to help me get him into the back seat."

He's *got* to live, Julia thought. If the doctors can just bring him to consciousness, he can heal himself. When he realizes I've saved his life, maybe he'll listen to me. He's got to listen. I'll convince him, I'll reason with him. He'll be able to prove to everybody that there will be an invasion. When they see all the things he can do, they'll have to believe him.

They put Walt in the car. They handled him as gently as they could.

"He's almost gone," the farmer said.

"Get in front with me. You need a hospital, too."

The farmer slipped in beside her.

Julia spun the car around and plunged down the road toward the super-highway.

"Where's the nearest doctor?"

"Town eight miles down the road," the farmer said. He grimaced in pain. He coughed, and blood

flecked his lips. He wiped off the blood and stared at it drying across the back of his hand. "I think I'm hurt inside." There was barely controlled hysteria in his voice. He coughed again and shuddered. "My wife, she wanted me to stay home this morning. He shut his eyes tightly. "I've got to patch the roof." He opened his eyes and looked pleadingly at Julia. "*I've got to patch the roof, don't you understand!*"

"I'm driving as fast as I can. Which way do I turn down here?"

" . . . turn right."

"We'll be to a doctor just as soon as I can get there."

She slowed down and turned onto the concrete slab of the super-highway.

Then she slammed the car to a full stop; she backed up out of the line of traffic, back onto the cross road. She cut the motor.

JULIA had felt the bridge in her mind snap shut. Instantly even the most obscure brain compartment was open to her. Fatigue vanished. She was alert; she was able to think with great clarity.

The lightning recovery of *herself* forced a series of ever widening implications to her attention; in a blinding flash of insight she was (perhaps actually for the first time) aware of the degree to which she could transform society.

Given time, she—she alone—like the magician Prospero in *The Tempest* could create some paradise of

cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces and solemn temples and winding brooks and crisp channels and green lands that need never (the Calibans being transmuted by power beyond the lust for power) dissolve into air, thin air, leaving not a cloud behind.

If all the people were as she, the great globe of the world could become an enchanted island: with wars and bloodshed and prejudice and inhumanity forgotten.

Some such was her thought. It washed over her, the vision, and vanished in the acute reality of the moment. Such a dream was athwart the invasion plan of the aliens.

She was out of the car. She was opening the rear door. She stood at Walt's head. He'll have to help me, she thought, he has information I want.

She felt for the pattern of his body. She experienced it. Concentrating with the full force of the human brain, she began to mend the breaks and ruptures and wounds.

It took time.

Don't reheal his mutant bridge, she thought. Leave him defanged.

His jaw returned to its socket. The dried blood on his skin no longer led from vicious gashes: they had closed and were knitting.

She was finished. He was still unconscious.

Even as she turned to heal the farmer, a section of her brain drew conclusions from the fact she could be relieved of her powers. Some outside force was responsible for hold-

ing the bridge closed in her mind. It could be turned on and off.

But why, when the force controlling her bridge had vanished, had Walt's bridge remained intact? She reviewed all the information she had.

There are two compartments of mutants on the alien ship.

Then each compartment must have its own frequency. The aliens selected Walt, she thought, to kill me because his bridge operated on a different frequency than mine.

Speechless the farmer had watched her heal Walt; now he relaxed under the soothing fingers of her thought. He *felt* the bone in his arm being made whole again.

He no longer needed to cough.

SHE tried to create a bridge in his brain; but she could not; it was outside the pattern. If she were to give him one, it would require surgery.

She was once again in the seat beside him.

"You're a, you're an *angel*," he said. Awe made his voice hollow. "I'll be God damned if you're not an honest to Jesus, real live angel."

"I'm human."

"... you couldn't be."

"Well, I am."

He frowned. lady, after what I just seen you do, I'll believe it if you say so. You just tell me, I'll believe it."

"I've got to get into San Francisco. I'll have to leave you. You can catch a ride or something."

He scrambled out of the car.

Impulsively Julia reached in her handbag for a bill. She found one. "Here", she said, thrusting it on him, "this is for your milk."

The farmer took it automatically. He put it in his wallet and put the wallet back in his overalls without bothering to watch what he was doing. He was watching her.

If they're all as easy to convert as he is . . . she thought.

"Can I ask you a question?"

"What?" she said.

"If you're human, what am I?"

"We're not *quite* the same," Julia said. "Maybe some day we will be . . ."

She wheeled onto the super-highway and headed toward San Francisco.

She switched on the automatic-drive and turned her attention to Walt.

She was unable to awaken him. After such a severe shock as he had experienced, his nervous system demanded rest; he no longer had the recuperative powers of a mutant.

Even if I alert Earth, she thought what can we *do*? How can we prepare? I could . . . but I'm only one. They'd gang up on me and kill me in a minute . . . Earth will fight; at least we won't give up. I'll have to get us as ready as I can, and we'll fight.

I need Walt. What kind of weapons will we be up against? Where will the invasion strike first? When? He'll have scraps of information that I can put together to tell me

more than he thinks he knows.

How can I convince him to help me?

. . . if I've figured it out right, there's got to be records somewhere. Birth certificates, things like that. If I'm right about babies being missing the year of the last big saucer scare, there's got to be birth certificates. I'll check newspaper files in San Francisco.

If I can just find Walt's birth certificate! That will convince him!

She thought about the space station floating somewhere in the sky; she tried to picture the aliens who manned it.

God knows how, she thought, but we'll fight!

IN the space station, the aliens were in conference.

There can't be any doubt but that she's dead, Forential projected.

Your Walt is a good one, Lycan thought. **Best mutant on the ship.**

Jubilation flowed back and forth. The other aliens congratulated Forential.

It was nothing, Forential told them.

I feel infinitely better, now that she's out of the way, the Elder commented.

We'll strike with the main force a day before we planned to, Lycan told them. **That's best all around. We expect most trouble from the American Air Force. It will be least alert on a Sunday

morning.**

IN San Francisco Julia drew up in front of an unpretentious hotel on Polk Street. Walt was still unconscious in the back seat.

After she arranged for a room, she returned to the car. She seized Walt at his arm pits and hauled him to the sidewalk. She held a tight distortion field around his body. He was dead weight against her. She draped one of his arms about her neck. When she began to walk, his feet shuffled awkwardly.

She felt as conspicuous as if she were smoking a pipe.

She wedged her body against the door of the hotel and dragged Walt inside. Although he was invisible, the effect of his body pulling down on hers was readily apparent. She half stumbled toward the elevator.

The clerk, a counterpart of the one she had had in Hollywood looked up in annoyance. He snorted through his nose. He eyed her narrowly. He seemed about to leave his position behind the desk.

Julia propped Walt against the wall and rang for the elevator. She smiled wanly in the direction of the clerk. Shaking his head and grunting his disapproval, he settled back in his chair.

Walt's heavy breathing was thunderous in her ear. She braced him with her hip when he started to slip to the floor.

The elevator came,

"Step up, please."

Straining against his weight, she hauled Walt's feet up over the edge of the cage. The feet scraped loudly on the floor.

The elevator operator raised his eyebrows ever so slightly. He cocked his head to one side. "Something wrong?"

"Oh, no," Julia said brightly. "Everything's fine."

The operator started the car. "A young lady ought to be careful in this town," he said. "A young lady oughtn't to drink so much." He shook his head sadly. "There's a case of rape in the papers nearly every day."

" . . . I'll be careful."

"They pick up young ladies in bars all the time. You never can tell about the men you're liable to meet, if you go in bars. You have to watch yourself in this town."

"Seven, please."

"Yes, ma'm."

The elevator stopped. Julia dragged Walt out.

"You mind what I say!" the operator called after her. "You be careful, now, and stay out of bars. You never can tell . . ."

Once she got Walt inside her room, she breathed a sigh of relief. She released the distortion field. He was visible again.

She removed the top sheet from the bed. She wrestled his body on to the bed.

She ripped the sheet into strips. She worked rapidly. She was still able to hold off fatigue; she felt no need of sleep. She was ravenous-

ly hungry.

With the strips of sheet, she tied Walt securely. She used a knot that would require cutting to be undone. She pulled the strips tight. They did not interfere with free circulation, but there was no possibility of them being slipped. She had no intention of not finding Walt there when she came back.

She surveyed her handiwork with satisfaction.

WHISTLING softly she left the room and walked down the corridor. She stopped whistling abruptly and glanced around in embarrassment. She had remembered the old adage: 'A whistling girl and a crowing hen are sure to come to some bad end'.

There seemed to be something *indecent* about whistling in public.

The fact that she had, colored her emotions with uneasiness.

She realized that there might be a million such superstitions—many of them not recognized as superstitions at all—buried in her personality. Her brain might be highly efficient, but was it efficient enough to overcome all the emotional biases implanted by twenty-four years of environment? Was even her knowledge of the real nature of the world—was mankind's—sufficient to overcome such biases?

Perhaps, she thought, I'm not as smart as I thought I was. There may be deep and illogical currents in me. Perhaps I'm not, not *mature* enough for such power as I've been

given.

Annoyed, she took out a cigarette, and in defiance of cultural tradition, lit it there in the corridor while she waited for the elevator.

The operator did not approve of women smoking in public. He said so.

She ate in the coffee shop.

After the meal, she took a cab to the offices of the morning paper.

In the entranceway to the building, sure that no one was watching, she became invisible.

Half an hour later, possessed of the information she had come after (harvested from the back files of the paper) she was once again in the street.

In her room, she went to the telephone. She placed a long distance call to a Boston hospital.

The news had not been widely reported. She found most of the names in brief paragraphs stating that Mr. and Mrs. such and such had settled their suit against the so and so hospital out of court. In the three cases where the confinements had been in private homes, there had been kidnapping stories in the paper. In one of the cases, a man had later been convicted and executed—although the body of the child had never been recovered from the pond into which the prosecution contended it had been thrown.

She talked to the switch board operator at the Boston hospital. She was given the superintendent. He—impressed by the fact that she

was calling from the Pacific coast—sent his secretary to rummage the files for the hospital's copy of the birth certificate.

Julia waited.

"Yes, I have it."

"It's on the child of Mr. and Mrs. George Temple?"

"That's right."

Julia concentrated as hard as she could.

"You have it in your hand?"

"Yes."

"Would you look at it closely?"

" . . . what?"

"Look at it closely, please."

"Young lady—"

"Please, sir."

"All right. I am. Now what information did you want? It reads—What the hell! Where did that go? Say, how did you—"

Julia hung up. She looked at the birth certificate lying by the telephone. She picked it up. It was none the worse for teleportation.

She put it on the dresser and returned to the phone.

By the time Tuesday was well into the afternoon, when the cool rays of the winter sun lay slanting upon the murmuring crest outside, she had nine birth certificates on the dresser. Nine times the bell boy had come to her room to collect for the telephone charges. The last time, she forgot to make Walt invisible. The bell boy said nothing.

JULIA was annoyed by her carelessness. The bell boy's foot-falls died in the carpet of the corri-

dor. She went to the door and looked out. He was gone.

She closed the door and crossed to the bed. She had exhausted her list of names. She set about rousing Walt.

He's handsome, she thought.

His eyelids flickered.

He opened his eyes. Memory slowly darkened his irises. He glared up at her.

He surged at his bonds, striving to rip free and throw himself upon her. He tugged at his right hand. His fingers writhed. A frown passed over his face. He jerked his right hand savagely.

"You have been deprived of your power," Julia said.

Stunned, he lay back. "I, I don't understand."

"You thought you were a Lyrian," Julia said. "You were wrong. You're an earthman. I am an earthwoman."

"That's a lie! I'm not an earthman!"

"You are now. How are you different?"

"That's a lie. I'm, I'm . . ."

He fought against the tentacle-like strips of sheet.

"Is it a lie, Walt?"

He continued to struggle.

Smiling, she taunted him: "When I was a little girl, I used to get mad and throw rocks . . . It never did any good. Lie still."

I shouldn't tease him, she thought contritely.

She felt very sorry for him. How frustrated he must feel! How hurt

and puzzled and helpless and betrayed!

He's like Samson shorn.

"I know how you feel," she said softly. "I felt that way when you were chasing me. You're going to listen to me. After I'm through talking to you, maybe I'll let you up."

Glaring hotly, he relaxed.

"I saved your life," Julia said. "Don't forget that. You could thank me."

"You had a reason then. You're a traitor. You had your reasons to."

She slipped to the end of the bed. Gently she unlaced his shoes and slipped them off.

His face purpled with impotent anger.

She peeled off his socks.

Then, one by one, Julia compared the footprints on the birth certificates with Walt's feet.

Hot tears of defeat brimmed up within Walt; indignant rage filled his eyes.

Julia turned to put the birth certificates back on the dresser.

None of them corresponded to his prints.

WALT wanted to bite down on something. He gritted his teeth. Then, as Julia was turning away from him, he felt once again the weird blending of his mind with Calvin's. He realized that it was some exclusive power given to Calvin that caused the blending: he was not even any longer a, a Ly-

rian!

Joy vibrated in his body. Drawing on the new power in his mind, he hurled a picture from the wall at the back of Julia's unprotected head.

She half turned. The heavy wooden frame hit her in the temple. With a little despairing sigh of surprise she sank to the carpet.

I'll kill her this time, Walt thought. He displaced the binding from his right hand.

And Calvin's mind withdrew.

Walt tried desperately to tear loose his other hand; the knot would not yield. He tried to reach Julia. He tried to reach something to throw at Julia. He could not. He let out a roar of baffled rage.

Julia was struggling to her feet.

Standing uncertainly, she shook her head. Her eyes cleared. She let out her breath. The recuperative powers of a mutant were in action. "That was an awful wallop," she said calmly. "How did you manage it?"

Walt said nothing.

Julia wrinkled her forehead. Her mind was steady and alert. "I felt another mind just before I turned. Someone called Calvin, wasn't it?"

Walt was sweating. *How smart is she? Can she guess everything?*

"Somehow he gains rapport with you." Her fingers tapped restlessly on the dresser top. "If you could maintain contact with his mind all the time, you would; that's obvious, isn't it? He must make contact with yours, then. You don't

know just when he's going to contact you, do you?"

Walt licked his lips.

"He must be abnormal. A normal mutant couldn't do that. I'll have to find some way to seal his mind off from yours, I guess. I'll have to interfere with that sort of thing. In the meantime, I'll have to keep a sharp eye on you."

Walt glared at her. "Damn you," he said.

"Why don't the aliens do the fighting for themselves?"

The question was unexpected. "You got it wrong," he said automatically. "They are helping Lyrians out of the goodness of their hearts." It was as if he were speaking to Calvin; it made him feel, momentarily, superior to her. He grasped the opportunity with pathetic gratefulness. "They're afraid!" he cried triumphantly. "We're not that far advanced yet!"

Julia paused to consider this. "Yes, that figures," she said. "But suppose for a minute that you're not a Lyrian. Suppose they're using you to fight for *them*."

"No," Walt said.

"But why not?"

"No," he repeated. He tried to keep doubt out of his voice. His anger was gone. He felt uncertain and confused. He could not think clearly.

"You're a mutant," Julia said. "Like I am. Our parents were earthlings. The aliens are using mutants. The aliens changed our parents' genes—"

"I don't understand that word."

Julia smiled twistedly. "Think how ignorant they kept you, Walt. Isn't that proof enough for you?"

Walt said nothing.

" . . . Genes are the substances which transmit characteristics from generation to generation. If you wish to change hereditary characteristics, you must change the genes. The aliens changed our genes so we would be able to use all of our brains. The normal earthling is just like you are right now: unable to use more than one sixth of his brain. The aliens collected all the mutants; all of them but me. They overlooked me."

Walt twisted uncomfortably.

"But they still control us," Julia said. "There is a bridge that is held closed by a special frequency. That's why we've just recently been able to use our full powers. They just recently turned the frequency on."

"But—"

"The frequency that controls my bridge is different from the one controlling yours. There are two groups of mutants on the ship. The female you saw, the one you thought was a Lyrian, was a mutant from the other group. I'm on the frequency of that group. It's the group that's going to attack Earth first. They are the ones that are going to cause the war your Forential told you about."

WALT'S mouth was dry. Stop! he wanted to cry to her.

Please, stop!

" . . . keep birth records," Julia continued. Walt had missed some of it. "No two sets of prints can be identical. A group of babies vanished during the last big flying saucer scare. *You were one of them.* I was trying to find your birth certificate. If I could find it "

Julia talked on. Her voice was sincere and intense and compelling. As he listened, Walt felt the case against the aliens grow stronger.

Can't think clearly, he told himself. Trust Forential.

No.

He did lie about the war.

Forential lied about that.

He'd lie about about other things?

They kept me in ignorance, he thought. Perhaps they really were afraid I'd discover my real nature.

I don't know; I can't think; I can't *think!*

As he watched Julia, the female who had (the truth of this slowly dawned on him) actually saved his life, he felt the first stirrings of an emotion he was not prepared to cope with. How pretty she looked, standing before him, her eyes serious and her face intent. He wanted to nestle her.

The footprints, he thought. She couldn't find mine among the birth certificates she had. She could have faked a set if she'd wanted to. Does the fact she didn't mean she's not lying?

I think I'm sorry I threw the picture at her.

"If you could have heard Mrs. Savage on the phone," Julia said, "you'd understand better. She lost her son—had him *stolen*—and she was still saving the birth certificate, after this long. She told me she knew she'd find him some day."

Mrs. Savage sounds just like Forential, Walt thought.

"She's been waiting all these years," Julia said. "She's never given up hope."

Still waiting for her son, Walt thought. Still waiting, still needing her son.

Walt had never thought much of his parents until now. They were obscured by Forential; they existed somewhere on Lyria. But suppose Julia were telling the truth? Would they have been more fond of him than Forential? Could they have been?

There were so many things he did not understand. He must ask Forential about the process by which babies are created; what was the connection between parent and child? It was all so *puzzling*.

why not ask Julia?

"Wait a minute," Walt interrupted. "I understand so very little. How are babies made?"

And there was a harsh, peremptory knock on the door. The manager's angry voice came booming through the paneling:

"The bell boy tells me you've got a man tied to the bed in there! We can't have that sort of thing in this hotel! Open the door, you hear me? Open the door!"

CHAPTER X

“OH, oh,” Julia whispered. “You keep your mouth shut, Walt.”

She projected a distortion field around him.

The bed now appeared untenanted.

Walt was silent.

Julia opened the door. The manager stormed in.

“You, you creature!” he cried. “Tying a defenseless man on the bed for God knows what evil purpose. Hummm.” he stared at the bed.

“Oh,” he said.

“There’s no one here but me.”

“The bell boy—”

The manager searched the room. He looked in the closet. He looked in the shower. His face slowly began to take on color.

Foolishly he got down on his knees and peered under the bed.

“Well,” he said, dusting off his trousers as he stood up, “well . . . oh . . . Is the service all right, Miss? Do you have any complaints? Plenty of towels? Soap? Did the bell boy raise the window—yes, I see he did. There’s enough heat? I, I seemed to have—I was on the wrong floor entirely. You see—”

His face grew even more puzzled. “There’s a woman on the, on the *ninth* floor I guess it is—how could I ever have made such a mistake? this is the seventh floor, isn’t it?—has a man in her bed.” His face got redder. He waved his hands:

“Tied to the bed.”

“Oh, my,” Julia said.

“Yes, isn’t it. Now, if you want anything, don’t hesitate to ring. I’m sorry about this mistake. Silly of me. This is the *seventh* floor isn’t it?”

“Yes, this is the seventh floor.”

The manager left.

Julia locked the door behind him.

She dissolved the distortion field.

“Whew!” she said. “He was mad, wasn’t he?”

Walt tried to sit up.

“No — wait. I think I’ll take a chance. I’m going to leave you alone to think over what I’ve said. Then I’m going to come back and untie you. You’re going to help me, Walt.”

“I, I don’t know what to think.”

“Here’s one thing I want you to remember when you’re thinking everything out. *People can be convinced of anything as long as they have no way of checking beliefs against facts.* Remember that. Fortential had complete control over you. You believed what he told you to. Now you’ve had a chance to see for yourself. You’re just like an earthling. There is no war. Things like that. Think for yourself, Walt.”

“How long will you be gone?”

Julia gathered up her handbag. She folded the birth certificates and stored them in it. “I don’t know. I’ve got to convince someone of some facts that are going to be very hard to believe.” She paused at the door. “I won’t forget you, Walt. I’ll be back soon.” She

smiled almost shyly. "If Calvin contacts you again, don't go away. I'll just have to hunt you down."

AFTER she had gone, Walt relaxed. His body was still weak. He lay staring at the ceiling. Outside, the sun's rays slanted even more. A breeze, chill with approaching night, rustled the curtain.

There were shadows along the far wall.

I've been an instrument, Walt thought, a piece of metal, to be used as Forential saw fit: if she were not lying. My parents are somewhere down here on this planet, the third from the sun. They are not on Lyria. I might have killed them during the invasion. That would be worse than killing Forential, even. If Julia weren't lying to me. Forential has been raising me to fight my own people!

Forential. Saucer eyed. Tentacled. Moist and slippery. Breathing in labored gasps under high gravity. Air bubbling in his throat. Tentacles caressing, fondling—not with affection (if Julia is right) but with calculating design: to fashion my personality to his purpose.

Walt closed his eyes.

Forential, he thought.

Forential was far away in space; every second he was growing farther away in time. I've lost him, Walt thought. So much has happened, so much, so fast, since last I saw him, that I'm changing away from

him every minute.

Earthlings aren't so bad. They're—they're not too much different from Lyrians, from *mutants*.

I'm a mutant?

I'm not a Lyrian?

FORENTIAL!

But Forential could not hear him.

I'll have to think for myself, Walt decided. Julia said I couldn't be fooled if I just looked at the facts.

Earthlings aren't like Forential always told us they were. They're pleasant enough. In their way. I don't see how they can menace Lyria (if there is such a place.) • *I don't think they've even got space travel!*

He tossed restlessly on the bed.

And Julia, he thought. Well, she's nice. She's all right.

She's

Again the new emotion troubled him. He missed her. He wished she would hurry back.

Julia!

and why *did* she lose her powers if she's a Lyrian? Why did I? Lyrians shouldn't lose their powers.

What about the machines on the ship?

Can there really be another compartment of—mutants?

Is that why the walls of the ship were impenetrable?

Is that why we were never permitted in more than a fraction of the overall space of the ship?

I don't think, I don't think I like Forential any more.

JULIA consulted a phone directory for the address of the local F. B. I. office.

It was four thirty when she arrived, and only one man was still in the office. He had his feet propped up on the desk; he was smoking a pipe and reading a law book.

"Yes?" he said, standing up as Julia came forward.

"You better sit back down," she said.

"Well, now . . . And who are you?" He said it not unkindly.

Julia gave her name. Gravely he shook hands with her.

"Sit over there, Julia," he said.

When she was seated, he sat down. He bent forward and cleared his throat.

Oh, dear, how can I start? she thought. How can I ever start? "What, what was the page you were reading in your book?"

He ignored the question. His eyelids drooped wearily. He took out a notebook. He unscrewed his pen cap.

"I suppose you want to report on the family next door?" he said.

"Well, as a matter of fact, no," Julia said. "I wanted—" And again her resolve faltered.

"Yes?" the F.B.I. man asked.

His law book floated from the table behind him and drifted over his shoulder. It opened itself before his face. The pages riffled.

"What page?" Julia asked intently.

The F.B.I. man took his pipe out of his mouth and looked at it.

"Page one hundred and fifteen," he said.

The book fell open to that page.

The F.B.I. man plucked it out of the air. He felt all around it. He put it in his lap. His eyelids were no longer weary.

"I think I underestimated you," he said. "I believe I'm going to sit right here and take down every word you say." He gestured with his pipe. "Start talking."

Julia spoke slowly. She gave the F.B.I. man all the information she had. His pen skimmed rapidly, making short hand squiggles over the white pages of his notebook.

WHEN she had finished, he looked up. He tossed the law book toward the desk. She caught it and let it down gently, so that it landed without a sound.

"Julia," the man said, "put yourself in my position. What would you do if someone came to you with a story like this?"

"I'd send that person to Washington, where she could talk to somebody."

"I'd like a little more proof."

Julia passed her hand through the back of the chair. "I should certainly be investigated: just on the basis of being able to do that, shouldn't I?"

The F.B.I. man nodded. "Do that again."

Julia did.

"Excuse me a minute," he said. He swiveled to his desk. He picked up his phone and dialed. He waited.

"... Peggy? This is me. I won't be home for dinner tonight. A case just came in." He hung up.

He turned back to Julia.

"Now, about this space station. How is it we haven't seen it?"

"I assume it has a distortion field around it. It's invisible."

"Hummmm." He entered that in his notebook. "Is there any way we could detect it?"

"I... If I were able to talk to a physicist, he might be able to build detection equipment. It would take time."

"I see. Now, about this Walt. How dangerous would you say he is?"

"I disconnected the bridge in his mind."

"Bridge?"

"I call it that. It's what makes us different. It could be built into a normal human being, I think."

"You mean," he said, "I could be fixed up to do the things you can do? Teleportation? Telepathy?"

"If I were a surgeon, I think I could change your brain to our pattern. I can see how it should be done. But I'd have to train to be able to. Surgery is a skill; it takes practice to master it."

"How long?"

"I don't know."

"How long until the invasion?"

"I don't know that either. I don't know whether or not I can find out from Walt. I doubt if he has enough information to tell me. Very soon now. Less than a month. Maybe even tomorrow."

"There's no time, then," he said. He chewed his lip. "I see. The Air Force still has its saucer files. I'm going to refer you to it."

"We haven't much time. Remember that."

The F.B.I. man looked at his watch. "There's a plane to Washington in three hours. I'll get you reservations on it. I'll phone the head office there. There'll be somebody from the Air Force to meet you."

"I'll leave at eight, is that right?"

"From the city airport. Just a minute. I'm going to assign a man to you. I don't want anything happening between now and then."

"I can look out for myself," Julia said. "I'll pick up my ticket and Walt's at the reservation booth. 'Bye.'"

The F.B.I. man blinked his eyes. She had vanished. He got up and searched the office carefully. The door had not opened.

But she was gone.

Sweating, he went to the phone.

In less than two minutes, he was talking to Washington. When he recradled the phone, he was shaking. He took out his pipe, filled it, lit it, walked to the window.

He looked out at the twilight city. A lone star sparkled in the sky. He stared upwards.

"My God," he said softly to himself.

He crossed to the teletype, switched the current on. He began typing his notes on it for the benefit of Washington.

BACK in the hotel room, Julia released Walt. Free, he stood up uncertainly.

"I think you'll help me," she said levelly. "I disconnected the bridge in your mind; I'm going to leave it that way. I can't afford not to. But am I right, Walt?"

"I'm not sure. I, I'll have to see."

"We're going to fly to Washington tonight."

"Washington?"

"The seat of the government. You clean up in the bathroom, now. But hurry. We'll have to catch a plane out of here at eight o'clock. It's after six."

"All right."

While she was waiting, she studied herself despairingly in the mirror. I look, she thought, like something the cat dug up.

When Walt came back, she took his arm possessively.

"I'm hungry," he said.

"Oh?" Julia said. "We'll have time to eat, I guess. I wish we didn't have to eat hotel food, though. I'm a good cook." She led Walt to the door. "You'll see what I mean, if we can get this invasion stopped. I'm going to make you invisible, now."

After they ate, Julia drove her car to the airport. The reservations were waiting. So was the F.B.I. man.

"I teletyped my report to them. They wanted me to accompany you."

He introduced himself to Walt.

Walt shook his hand. Walt no

longer recoiled from the touch of an earthling.

In the plane, the F.B.I. man ordered cocktails. Walt had never tasted alcohol before. It was an unpleasant taste. But once it was down, it was not objectionable.

He forced himself to drain the glass. He felt himself relaxing.

"Ugh," he said.

The F.B.I. man ordered another round. Julia declined. Walt accepted.

Walt said, "I feel *warm*."

The F.B.I. man kept glancing out the window of the plane, up at the stars. Clouds hung below; moonlight played over them.

Walt found that he was very fond of Julia. If only, he thought, she weren't so damned superior!

The alcohol filtered through his body. The compartment of the airplane danced not unpleasantly. He longed to feel Julia very close to him. He wanted to reach out and touch her uncovered skin.

Faintly, far off, barely heard was the sound of the others talking.

He grew heavy and sleepy. He closed his eyes.

He awakened once, and Julia was not beside him. He moved his tongue. It felt fuzzy and thick.

He wanted Julia.

"Julia!" he cried.

"I'm just up here," she called softly.

Disturbed passengers muttered their annoyance.

The stewardess came to Walt's

seat.

"I don't want you!" Walt said.
"Julia!" he shouted.

Julia came back to him.

"Sit down beside me," he commanded. And when she did, he went promptly back to sleep.

IT was after three o'clock Wednesday morning when their plane set down wheels on the Washington airport runway.

A sleepy-eyed Air Force colonel was waiting at the gate. The F.B.I. man approached him. "Here they are."

"Okay."

The colonel crossed to them.
"You're to come along with me."

"All right."

Walt shook his head to clear the sleep from his eyes.

They followed the colonel to the waiting, olive drab passenger car. The F.B.I. man had departed.

The colonel helped Julia in.

"We've got rooms for you downtown."

"Whatever you've decided," Julia said.

The colonel gave his driver the address.

Half an hour later, Julia and Walt and the colonel reached their destination.

"I must be a mess," Julia apologized. "I haven't had time to change clothes or anything."

"I'll order you some," the colonel said.

They went immediately to the third floor.

"This is your room," the colonel told Walt, opening the door.

"I want to stay with Julia," Walt said.

"This is your room," the colonel said stiffly. He signaled the guard lounging at the end of the corridor. The guard came.

"This is your man," the colonel told the guard.

The guard nodded.

"He's not to leave."

Walt planted his feet. "I'm not —"

"Go on in, Walt," Julia said.

Walt hesitated.

"Go on."

Reluctantly, Walt entered the room. The guard pulled the door closed.

"You're to come here," the colonel said. He led the way.

Once in her room, he said, "I know you're tired."

Julia realized that she *was* tired. Even her mutant powers could not keep fatigue out of her body forever. Her muscles ached. The strain and excitement had sapped her energy to a greater extent than she had realized.

"I am, a little. A few hours rest —"

"Would you sign this first?" the colonel asked. "It's a transcript of your conversation with the F.B.I. man. To make it official. It's all we need for the moment."

Julia flipped through it. It was very accurate.

The colonel produced a pen.

Julia signed.

"Now, one last thing. What sort of clothing did you want? I'll have my secretary buy the things in the morning."

Using hotel stationery, Julia made a list.

The colonel took it. "We'll call you in sometime tomorrow morning to get your testimony."

"I better give you some money for the list."

The colonel smiled. "You're a guest of the Air Force. We'll take care of it." At the door he said, "Oh, by the way, don't try to leave this room."

He closed the door softly behind him.

Julia undressed quickly.

She fell into bed.

Six hours later, at ten o'clock in the morning, she awoke with a start. Someone was knocking.

"Yes?"

"A package for you."

She drew the bed clothes around her. "Just set it inside the door."

The sentry complied.

Julia got up. She felt completely refreshed. She showered.

Opening the package, she was delighted with the clothing the colonel's secretary had selected.

She dressed and combed her hair.

When she tried to leave the hotel room, the sentry barred her way.

"What about breakfast?"

"Order whatever you want from room service," the man told her.

Julia closed the door. I should show him!—she thought.

But then: Where could I go if I

did go out? Suppose they come for me and I'm gone?

She phoned for breakfast.

The guard stood by while it was brought in. To keep me, she thought, from talking to the waiter.

By noon she still had received no word from the government.

She was growing annoyed.

IT was after two o'clock when the colonel—the same one who had met them at the airport last night—came for her. "Sorry to keep you so long," he said. "They're ready to see you now."

"I'm ready."

"We're going over to the Pentagon."

"Let's go."

They stopped to pick up Walt.

He had gotten a razor from somewhere; the stubble on his face was gone. His skin was smooth and boyish. He was dressed in a single breasted, brown suit. His white shirt was open at the neck.

Julia's heart caught in her throat with pride when she saw him. She blushed.

"He's been pacing the floor for the last hour," the guard said.

"We're going to talk to some government official," Julia said. She smiled up at him. "How do you feel, Walt?"

"I'm fine. Fine. Nervous. But I feel fine."

"They're waiting," the colonel said. "We better hurry."

Julia took Walt's hand. "It's all right. You don't need to be afraid."

"I'm not afraid," he said.

The same olive drab car was waiting for them outside the hotel. They got in—the colonel in front with the driver, Walt and Julia in back.

The car moved into Washington traffic.

Bleak, harsh winter lay over the town; the very air seemed weary and exhausted. Julia stared out the window at the passing buildings.

The invasion, she thought. Flying saucers settling down upon such a commonplace, solid scene as this. Terrified faces in the streets. Cries. The whine of a police car. An air raid warning, wailing like a lost night express. Brick and cement buckling and exploding. Walls crashing. Smoke billowing up. The helpless, ironic chuckle of a machine gun seeking a target. The drone of a plane

Suppose the government won't believe our story after all! she thought.

"You're going to help us all you can, aren't you, Walt?" she whispered. Her fingers plucked nervously at her dress.

"This morning, I had a long talk with the man at my door. I'll help you all I can. He'd never even heard of Lyria; he—"

The colonel swiveled his head. "We consulted with the President this morning."

Julia felt herself grow tense. "Yes?"

"He instructed us to have the two of you interviewed by some of the best authorities we could round

up on such short notice. You will be required to demonstrate this ability you seem to have to teleport objects."

"I'll do everything I can."

The colonel grunted and turned back to watching the road.

The Tidal Basin lay to one side of the car; the Washington Channel to the other. Off the highway, the rotunda dome of the white marble Jefferson Memorial glistened in the weak sunlight; the cherry trees around it were naked with winter.

Julia listened to her own breathing; she forced herself to relax. I've got to convince them, she thought.

In spite of her superiority, she felt like a little girl venturing into a big, unfamiliar world.

Shortly, the car drew up at the huge Pentagon building.

Inside it, army men—officers and enlisted men—were scurrying about, up and down ramps, in and out of the endless maze of corridors. There was a brisk hum of voices; it was like a giant bee hive. The high heeled shoes of female personnel chattered efficiently from room to room.

"Stay close," the colonel said. "It's easy to get lost."

ALL the noises of the building were swallowed up when the colonel closed the office door on the third floor. The elderly female receptionist at the desk looked up.

"They're waiting, Colonel Robertson. Go right in."

"Right through here," the colonel said.

Walt and Julia followed.

He opened the door, and they issued into the conference room. Talking broke off; faces swung to confront them.

"Gentlemen," the colonel said, "this is the girl, and this—this is the man from the space station."

The audience around the table rustled.

"You'll sit right here," the colonel told them. He helped Julia to her chair. When they were both seated, the colonel withdrew.

Chairs scraped and squeaked.

One of the men across from Julia cleared his throat. He was in civilian clothes. He was slightly stooped and partly bald. He wiped his glasses nervously. "We would like a demonstration of your—your, um, um unusual propensities." He adjusted his glasses.

The glasses disengaged themselves from his ears and floated toward Julia. Julia stood up and walked through the table toward them.

She reached out. Both she and the glasses vanished.

One of the general officers made a check mark on his note book. "I'd say our report is substantially correct."

The other civilian in the room, a youngish blonde woman, lit another cigarette. The ash tray before her was overflowing. Her fingers were nicotine stained. "Very extraordinary."

Julia materialized back in her chair. She replaced the glasses.

The conferees began to whisper

softly.

The blonde nodded her head. She turned to Julia. "About this space station—"

"This is Doctor Helen Norvel," one of the general officers told Julia.

Dr. Norvel ignored him. "Is there some way we could detect it?"

"I'd like to try to explain the nature of the distortion field surrounding it to a physicist."

"Dr. Norvel," someone said, "is one of our better experimental physicists."

"Oh?"

"Gentlemen," Dr. Norvel said, "let me talk to her in the next room while you question this man."

The bald civilian said, "Go right ahead, Doctor."

The doctor stood up. Lighting another cigarette, she said, "We'll go right in there, if you don't mind."

Julia got to her feet.

When they had gone, a lieutenant sitting beside the civilian looked up from a sheaf of papers in front of him. "Walt Johnson, isn't it?"

Walt gulped. He felt clammy and frightened.

"I'm supposed to interrogate you—ask you some questions."

"All, all right," Walt said nervously.

"Now, Mr. Johnson, if you'll just tell us—take it slowly; take your time—about life on this space station. Any details you can remember will prove helpful. Describe your quarters, the nature of the aliens—anything at all."

WALT twisted in the seat. He looked around at the waiting faces. A general lit a cigarette. The heating system hummed softly.

Walt began to talk.

From time to time, someone interrupted him with a question.

It seemed to go on forever.

"About this focus rod?"

"It sends out a, a radiation. Something. I don't understand too well. It's lethal."

"What is the radius of destruction?"

"I don't know; I don't remember."

Pens scribbled.

"Please continue," the lieutenant said.

Walt's throat grew dry as he talked. Someone got him a drink of water.

"Could you estimate the number of mutants in this other compartment?"

"I couldn't say. I couldn't swear that there is another compartment."

"A hundred? Five hundred?"

"I couldn't say."

"I see."

"About," a general asked, "how much of the total area of the ship would you say your compartment occupied?"

On and on.

"Let's go over the description of that machine again. Did you ever see this Fierut disassemble any part of it?"

Walt was limp and exhausted. His mind was dulled by the effort of concentrating continuously. "Yes." "No." "To understand

that "I don't know." "No, no more than that . . . Please. I'm getting confused."

"You've been very helpful, Mr. Johnson," the lieutenant said. "Gentlemen, I'm afraid he's getting a little tired. Shall we postpone further questioning?"

"I believe we better. Would you call in Dr. Norvel, please."

Walt slumped down in his seat.

The conferees whispered among themselves and compared notes.

Julia and the doctor came back.

"It took longer than I thought," Dr. Norvel said. "I had to teach her quite a bit of math."

"What's your opinion?" the bald civilian asked.

"I believe her, gentlemen. She has just shown me how to build some electronic equipment. I'll have a picture of that space station for you within two weeks."

"That will be all, then, for right now," the civilian said. He nodded at Walt and Julia. "The colonel is waiting to take you back to your hotel."

"You're not to talk to anyone about this," one of the generals said.

THURSDAY. They came for Walt and Julia at nine o'clock. The hotel was aswarm with the military.

"Security measures," the colonel explained as they waited for the elevator. "If any information about this leaks out, the whole country will be thrown into a panic."

Julia nodded.

"We've evacuated the civilians to another hotel," the colonel said.

Two guards with rifles stood at the street doorway.

"It's going to be a hard day for you both," the colonel said once they were in the car. "You're scheduled to meet representatives of some foreign countries at ten o'clock. And after that, we'll spend the rest of the day picking both your brains as clean as we know how."

"That's the way it's got to be," Julia said. "I understand."

It was after midnight when she returned to her hotel. Surprisingly, she was able to sleep until dawn. She arose and showered in the first sunlight and dressed and ordered breakfast. The sergeant on duty at the desk downstairs went out himself to get it for her.

At nine (this was Friday morning) she and Walt were back in the Pentagon. Walt's face was puffy, his eyes were red. "I'm tired," he murmured as an officer hurried him toward a meeting with the Ordnance Section. For a moment Julia considered restoring his mutant bridge. But she was not completely certain that she could trust him; even the tiniest doubt was an excuse not to—since there was no overwhelming advantage to be gained from having two mutants instead of one in the Pentagon.

A few minutes later, Julia was ushered into the office of one of the very high ranking general officers. He rose to greet her, and then re-

turned to his desk. Julia sat down across from him and he pushed stacks of reports to one side until he located his cigarette box.

Julia took a cigarette.

"Julia? I may call you that?"

"Please do."

He bent across the desk to light her cigarette. He pushed an ash tray toward her.

"I expect you'd like to know what we've done so far?"

"Very much."

"I'm preparing a report for the President. I hope to have it for him by noon." He glanced at his watch. "I want to verify with you everything that goes into it."

THE smoke made Julia dizzy. She cleared her brain. It was a relief to hear someone else talking for a change.

"We're preparing an atomic rocket to intercept their space station," he said. "I understand from this report that your mutant powers aren't infinite. It says in here somewhere that it would be impossible to stop by, by teleportation you call it, don't you? an object as large as a rocket?"

"It's mostly a question of inertia. There's a mass-speed-time ratio involved. The greater the first two, the more time required to divert the missile from its path. The mass-speed must be sufficient to create a greater diversion period than exists between the time of detection and the time of impact."

"You would say that the rocket

could get through?"

"If the same rule holds for the aliens as for us, I don't think they would have time to teleport it away."

"That's what I wanted."

"Just a minute, though. How long will it take you to complete it?"

"Give us another week," the general said. "That's one of the things I wanted to see you about. It will take Doctor Norvel longer than that to plot the orbit of the station. I want you to plot that orbit for us —"

"I'm sorry, General. This is in your reports somewhere, too. I can't. Not until Doctor Norvel can locate it. It's too far out for me to locate. I'd have to have an, an *anchor* on that end—something I could contact—before I could center on it. And I don't have. I can't even *feel* it, if you see what I mean. There's nothing to get ahold of. If I could . . . I could just teleport an atom bomb there, and we wouldn't need to worry with the rocket at all." She snubbed out her cigarette.

"Couldn't you get a fix on this frequency that controls your mutant powers and locate the space station that way?"

"Neither Dr. Norvel nor I could detect it with the available equipment: we tried. There's no way of knowing what equipment's required. It's probable the frequency is displaced from normal space; if it is, we can't even tell the increment of displacement. It's just a hopeless task."

"Well, it will take us two weeks

or more, then . . . " He crossed out something on the paper before him.

"Suppose they attack before that?"

"I'm coming to that possibility . . . I see you say here that mutants can be destroyed by bomb concussions because they can't displace sufficiently far without teleporting. What do you mean there?"

"It's complicated. If the bomb has too much inertia to be teleported off target, they have to remove themselves from the blast area. And they can't remove themselves far enough—not in space, but in relation to space; so they'd have to teleport, and that would be fatal."

"Ummm. Bullets?"

"They could displace themselves far enough to avoid a bullet."

The general wrote something down. "How large an explosion would suffice?"

"I believe Dr. Norvel has those figures. I didn't stay long enough to see the results of her computations. She figured it out. They rushed me off somewhere else."

"I'll have to ask her . . . Now. I'm counting on there being five hundred saucer ships in the first wave. With luck, our Air Force will get a few of them. You say—ah, yes, right here: 'If hit in the air, the pilots cannot displace out of the ship because they would be killed by the fall to Earth.' That's correct, isn't it?"

Julia nodded. "Yes."

"But I expect we'll have to destroy the majority of them after

they land; luck only goes so far."

"If they scatter all over the planet?" Julia asked.

"We have bombers alerted."

"Suppose they land in a city? You'd have to bomb immediately. You'd have to destroy the whole area before they could escape. You wouldn't have any time to evacuate the population. But even so, they could destroy the bomber crews with their focus rods before the planes were over the target—"

"Automatic bombers," the general said. "I hope we've got enough of them. As for the populations, I hope they don't land in our cities." He puckered his lips. "I've alerted all our ground forces. We'll have our whole supply of atomic artillery available. Whenever we discover a focus rod in operation, we intend to hit the center of the area of destruction with everything we've got."

"What do you honestly think?" Julia asked.

He shuffled papers, thinking. He looked up from the report. "It will take us over a week to get even partially ready. If they strike before that, we'll be able to kill some of them. If they give us a week, we might even hope to kill half of them—half of the first wave—before we're destroyed. I was hoping you might offer us an alternative, or a supplement; or something."

Julia took another cigarette. She fumbled in her handbag for a match. She lit the cigarette. "No," she

said.

"I rather thought not," he said. "I expected you'd have already told us."

"I've thought about it every way I know how. I thought about displacing all of them when they land; keeping them displaced, where they couldn't reach us. . . . But there'll be too many of them. I might be able to hold one mutant in displacement, even if he resisted me. I know more than he does. But five hundred?" She shook her head.

"Could we build a machine to do that job?"

"You'd have the rocket done much sooner."

"I expect that's right. I hope they just give us time."

"If I think of anything else—"

"Oh, I wanted to mention that," the general said. "I want to give you a phone number. You can reach me any time, day or night, through it." He wrote it on a piece of paper.

Julia memorized it at a glance.

The general made a few more notes. He glanced at his watch again. "I guess that's the size of it, Julia."

IN the space station, the aliens were readying for the invasion.

Lycan had just finished issuing clothing to the mutants in the larger compartment. Once dressed, they were indistinguishable from earthlings. And more important, when the larger transmitter was eventually cut off, Forential's mutants would

easily mistake them for earthlings.

Forential had finished assigning sectors of Earth to his own charges. Each was to cover a given area. They were told that the war on the planet was nearing its conclusion; destruction was everywhere. There would be no opposition to bother them. (In reality, Lycan's mutants, the first wave, having taken care of *that*.) They could clean up their assigned sectors slowly, thoroughly, methodically. Forential instructed them in all the details of detecting and tracking down earthlings. A month after their arrival, they would be, Forential said, the only survivors.

****It is,**** the Elder commented covetously, ****one of the prettiest little planets I've ever seen. We'll be well rewarded for our work.****

CHAPTER XI

JULIA awakened with a start very early Saturday morning. It was not yet three o'clock. Washington lay silent beyond her window. The dark, chill air of the room was motionless.

I forgot to seal Walt's mind off from Calvin's! she thought in blind terror.

She fumbled her bed clothes off and swung her feet to the carpet.

But once she was standing, the effects of the nightmare began to dissipate. She was surprised to find herself trembling. She laughed nervously. She had dreamed that Walt

was crossing the carpet toward her bed, walking in silent invisibility. He had raised a knife to plunge it into her heart—had raised a great rock to smash her skull—had aimed a pistol at her brain—while she lay in chill terror, waiting, helpless.

The cold made goose pimples on her naked skin. But her own laugh reassured her.

* A second of concentration and blood flowed skin-ward, warming her.

She found the light switch.

When the light came on, she heard the guard outside the door shuffle restlessly.

She began to dress. She needed no more sleep. She was anxious to get back on the job—trying to stop the invasion; although now, in spite of her mutant powers, now that the course of action was outlined, she seemed more in the way than of assistance.

Now why, she thought, would it suddenly seem so important that I should seal off Walt's mind? Yesterday, when he was so tired, I almost gave him back his mutant powers. I do trust him, don't I? Of course. After all the help he's given us, I know—there's not the tiniest doubt, really—that he's completely on our side.

Now why—?

Seal off mind

She tried to ignore the thought. It isn't that important, she argued with herself.

Seal off . mind . . .

Whoa! she thought.

Seal off *minds!*

Minds.

Harmonics powerful signal
transmit blanket

Pulling her blouse hastily over her head, she realized that it might be remotely possible!

As she reached for the phone, she tried to see the mathematics involved. I'll have to consult Dr. Norvel, she thought.

She dialed. Her hand began to tremble with eagerness.

The phone rang in her ear. Once. Twice. Three times.

"Hello?"

"Hello, this is Julia. Let me speak to the general. Hurry!"

Whoever was on the other end of the line moved quickly. Julia could hear a phone ringing in the receiver.

"Yes?" the general said, sleepy-voiced.

"Julia, General."

"Yes?"

"I *think* I've got something for you."

"Yes?"

"If we can transmit a powerful enough signal, we might be able to create harmonics that would interfere throughout the possible displacement area. Interfere with the frequency that closes our bridges, I mean. It's the same principle as concussion affecting the displacement area."

"Wait a minute. Okay, go on. I'm recording this, now."

"If our television and radio transmitters will handle the signal, we can blanket the whole planet with

interference. Any mutant that hits it will automatically be deprived of his mutant powers."

"What . . . ?"

"Look. We can make the whole first wave human normals. The Army can round them up and keep them unconscious while we adjust our interference to meet the second wave."

"I see, vaguely. What do you need?"

"Dr. Norvel."

"I'll phone her."

"A laboratory. An electronics laboratory."

"I'll get it."

"Enough time."

"All I can do on that score is hurry as fast as I can. As soon as I get your laboratory, I'll send a car around for you." •

"Right."

"I've got calls to make, then. You give me the details later."

"Goodbye."

Julia hung up.

SHE felt elation. She went to the window and breathed deeply. The air was exciting.

Two hours later, she was in a staff car speeding toward an experimental laboratory on the outskirts of town.

She was hustled inside the building by a sergeant and a colonel; gray, cloudy dawn hovered in the east.

Dr. Norvel was already waiting.

"Let's go to work," the doctor said.

"Right."

"What do you propose? The general said something about interfering with the frequency controlling your mind. How? We can't even detect it."

"We don't need to. We generate a signal, vary the frequency until I lose my mutant powers—and that's it! We generate as strong a signal as we can. Then we have every transmitter in the country put on a direct line to us. When the radar spots the first saucer, we let go with every kilowatt of power we've got."

"Good, good, good," Dr. Norvel said excitedly. "See if you can find some good coffee, you there, with the bird on your shoulder."

The colonel said, "Yes, m'am."

"I'll try to get some electronics men in to help," Dr. Norvel said. "We may need plenty of help."

"Is there a technical library around?" Julia asked. "I better read up on electronics."

"There's one in there," the puzzled night watchman said.

"I want you to get me somebody from the Army that can get me equipment, and fast," Dr. Norvel told the sergeant. He was standing helplessly by the door.

"I—"

"Hurry up, damn it!"

The sergeant shrugged in resignation. "All right, but they won't like it. I'm the one you should have sent for the coffee."

After the sergeant was gone, the colonel came back.

By noon, the laboratory was alive with activity.

By six o'clock, the signal generator was beginning to grow.

Julia supervised the crew laying cable. The cable would be connected to the nearest radio transmitter.

"Your transmitter will handle our signal?" Julia asked.

"You give it to us, and we'll tell you."

A general interrupted Julia. "I'm from General Tibbets. How's it going?"

"Can't tell."

"We're trying to scatter paratroops—detachments of them. All over. How long do we have?"

"It's up to *them*," Julia said. "I don't know when we'll be finished here."

"Our men should be stationed by morning."

"I hope we're through that early."

"You disarm these damned mutants, and we'll capture them."

"Hope to."

In the yard, a crew was unloading a new power supply.

"Knock a hole in the east wall and take it inside!" a harried officer bawled hoarsely.

"Some ass of a newspaper man did a report on unusual activity in the Pentagon and around Washington," Dr. Norvel said. "He hinted it had something to do with the flying saucer reports of twenty some years ago."

"How in hell did it leak?"

" . . . the Pentagon's issuing a denial."

BY midnight, Julia was superintending the construction of a second signal generator. Work on the first one was temporarily stalled; the technicians were waiting for a special transformer.

Dr. Norvel was waving an inked-in schematic diagram before the face of a gray haired man in an apron. "No, no, no," she said. "It's got to be *this* way to set up the right harmonics."

A major came up and tugged apologetically at Julia's arm. "Are you in charge here?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Well, if you are—please, Miss, my men have to rest. Can I let them go now?"

"We're not quitting 'til we finish—I'm sure of that."

The major went away, looking for someone else in authority.

Walt, his mutant bridge restored, was inspecting the second signal generator with interest. With it, the technicians would determine the signal that interfered with his frequency. They would set it to throb out that signal.

One section of the transmitter cable ran to each signal generator. A sergeant had just finished installing a switch that would control the signal being fed into the output line. After the first mutant wave had been captured, the switch would be thrown to the left. The signal covering Walt's powers would then be transmitted to the same network of radio and television stations that had carried the one covering Julia's;

and the second wave would be reduced to earth normal.

It was dawn before the first signal generator began operation. It was Sunday.

Julia sat at a desk, sipping coffee, holding a book suspended in front of her, six inches from the desk top. The last twenty-four hours had left a strain on her face. When the book fell, her mutant powers would be gone.

Smoking cigarette after cigarette, Dr. Norvel watched. After nearly fifteen minutes, she pleaded, "Drop, damn you, *drop!*"

Work on the second generator continued. It was at least half a day away from completion. There was a continual mutter of conversation about it in the background.

An hour later, sweat covered Julia's face. The book was still suspended.

"Put in the next frequency range unit," Dr. Norvel said wearily.

A general bustled in. "General Tibbets wants to know how we're doing here."

Silence greeted him.

"The paratroopers are ready," the general said defensively.

LYCAN bustled about, making last minute preparations in the larger compartment. His faceted eyes gleamed with excitement. Now and then he spoke to a mutant.

"You ready, Fred?"

"Yes, Lycan. I'm nervous, but I'm ready."

"It's natural," Lycan reassured.

The mutants shuffled their feet and cleared their throats and wiped their palms. They smiled uneasily.

"Form a line!" the Elder called. "We're ready to load you."

The mutants complied. They spoke in hushed undertones. Their focus rods, like tall staffs, bristled unevenly above their heads.

Lycan led them up the ladder to the second level. Led them down the long corridor. Led them past gleaming, whirring machinery.

In the huge, open launching area, the other aliens made last minute adjustments on the saucer ships.

The Elder sent the first group forward. They boarded their ships. The aliens withdrew.

A section of the wall unfolded. Air hissed away, expelling the saucer ships out into space. The mutants worked their simple controls. The saucer ships floated together as if for protection. On signal, they plunged earthward.

The section of the wall folded back. Air entered. The aliens rushed out and unloaded more saucer ships from the storage compartments.

Mutants entered and boarded. The aliens withdrew. The wall unfolded. A second group of saucer ships plunged earthward. The wall folded back. It was as if the space station had opened its mouth; as if the mouth had breathed flying saucers.

Down they came.

Early Sunday sunlight burst across the eastern part of the North Amer-

ican continent.

Nearly a thousand saucers, in five compact groups, one group for each continent, slipped one after another into the atmosphere.

There was no opposition. No planes rose to challenge them. They braked and flattened and skimmed toward their assigned landing sites.

And they touched down: in the hearts of industrial cities; in farm communities; at military installations. They streaked up from the horizon; they hovered; they settled gently to earth.

A few surprised early risers saw them flashing across the sky; saw them land; saw the mutants, armed with focus rods, step out and adjust themselves to the openness all around them. Hate was stamped plainly on the mutants' faces. They took their time, adjusting their focus rods for death and destruction. The few earthlings who saw them waited or fled or advanced with curiosity.

At the Infantry School at Ft. Benning, Georgia, a saucer landed in the third cortile. The three jump towers to the left were like bony fingers pointing accusingly at the sky.

THE troops, alerted, uncertain as to what they were waiting for, were lounging in the barracks. Their orders had been changed several times in the last few days. An orderly coming from "C" Company rec hall saw the saucer first. He watched the female mutant get out,

look around, shudder and shrink upon herself beneath the horrible, distant sky.

He went to report it to the O.D.

The female began to adjust her focus rod.

At the airport across the Chattahoochee River in Alabama, five battalions of paratroops were waiting assignment. They had been briefed on their jobs less than twelve hours ago. Cargo planes warmed up off the runways, poised for service.

The hastily organized message center was the focus of frantic activity. A teletype chattered. Telephones from radar stations rang and were answered. A harried clerk slipped a scribbled slip to a major waiting beside the desk. He read it, whistled, and trotted toward the main body of troops.

"There's one over in the third cortile."

A nervous captain stood up and field-stripped his cigarette. "Want me to jump—or take a truck?"

"Jump," the major said. "There's planes."

"Yes, sir."

"Load the third platoon," the captain called.

A transport, under instruction from a colonel, wheeled onto the runway.

The colonel came running up. "Load that platoon for Birmingham, Captain," he ordered. "Radar traced one down there."

"There's one in the third cortile on the Main Post," the major said.

"Get it with the next plane," the

colonel said.

The major trotted off to get a plane.

The captain told a lieutenant: "Take the fourth platoon, Hawkins."

The lieutenant saluted self-consciously. He crossed to his assignment and began to check his men's equipment. The men pulled nervously at their parachute harnesses and puffed at their cigarettes. "Don't forget to hook up in the plane."

Several men were waving out the next transport. It lumbered forward as the other one cleared the field and circled west toward Birmingham.

"I'd feel better with a rifle," one of the troops told the lieutenant.

"What the hell," one of the other men said, "You'd have to clean it when you got back!"

"Let's go!" the lieutenant said.

The platoon moved into the waiting transport.

A medical aide trailed up at the rear, carrying his hypodermic kit. Once the platoon overcame the mutant, he would inject enough morphine to knock the mutant out for at least twenty-four hours.

The female in the third cortile saw the lumbering transport, saw the silken blossoms swaying down from it. It amused her to wait. She was in no hurry. She was going to take it slowly at first: savoring the first few: before killing became a mere impersonal, mechanical operation.

The soldiers were unarmed. They landed, divested themselves of their chutes, trotted toward an assembly

area designated by the lieutenant. When they were grouped, they started to close in on her—advancing nervously.

She lifted the focus rod. So this was the best they could send against her! She concentrated. She would turn them into flaming torches. Then she would demolish all the buildings within range. But first the screaming human torches.

Nothing happened. The focus rod was as useless as wood.

Her mind was cramped. It was no longer as alert as it had been in the space station. She was now adjusted to the openness around her. She realized something was badly wrong.

The soldiers, smiling now, were almost upon her.

She dropped the focus rod and started to run.

IN Washington, Walt and Julia waited by the signal generator that was in operation, broadcasting its interference across the whole planet. Julia, bereft of her mutant powers, sat limply in a folding chair; her body was a stupor of exhaustion; she watched the activity around her with listless, heavy-lidded eyes.

General Tibbets paced nervously before the second generator.

Dr. Norvel hovered at the control panel.

"It's finished," a technician said, straightening stiffly from the electrical wiring at the rear of the panel.

The general stopped pacing.

"Walt! Are you ready?"

"Okay," Dr. Norvel said. "Turn it on."

"I'm ready," Walt said.

A power supply moaned.

"Here we go, Walt."

A technician ran a hand through his hair. "Keep your fingers crossed."

Walt, seated beside Julia, concentrated on the book. It floated above the desk.

Dr. Norvel moved the dial. Her face was pale and drawn.

The general coughed nervously.

The control light of the generator winked out.

Everyone held his breath.

The air was filled with the sharp, acrid odor of burning wiring.

"Unplug it!" Dr. Norvel cried.

A technician cut off the power.

"Oh, damn, damn, damn," Dr. Norvel said tonelessly.

The generator still smoked. A technician was trying to see into the wiring behind the panel. "Something shorted," he said unnecessarily, "It's a mess."

"We've got to get it fixed," Julia said dully.

Dr. Norvel collapsed, crying quietly. "It's too late; it's too late; it's too late."

"We worked too fast—"

Walt stood up. The book fell with a sharp, explosive sound now that he had stopped concentrating on it. "We'll have to find my frequency on the other generator."

"Not until we get all the first wave of mutants under control," Julia said. "We can't shut off their

interference before."

"Suppose it takes as long on your frequency as it did on Julia's?" Dr. Norvel said. "I don't think we've got that kind of time. As soon as *they* realize something's wrong . . ."

"What else can we do?" Walt asked.

Nobody answered.

Dr. Norvel rummaged nervously through her smock. "Anybody got a cigarette?"

The general fumbled in his uniform. "I'm out Colonel?"

"I'll send out for some, sir."

"Try in my handbag," Julia said. "I think there's some there."

The general went to the handbag. He opened it. He removed the birth certificates and found the cigarettes.

Dr. Norvel took one from him and lit it. "Thanks."

"What's these?" the general asked.

"Birth certificates," Julia said.

"Uh—?"

"Of some of the mutants," Julia said. "I kept them, kept them to establish paternity. When they were all captured."

The general tossed them on the table. "It doesn't look like we'll need them. Well, let's get that second machine going."

Technicians were already stripping out burned wiring. One of them was scribbling a list of replacement parts on a loose sheet of paper.

"I better see how many we've captured, so far," the general said.

"How long it will take to get them all."

The colonel stood respectfully aside, and the general walked heavily to the office.

THE laboratory was silent. After they heard him speak into the telephone, the technicians resumed conversation, hushed and hopeful, and nervous.

The general listened to the staff report from the Pentagon.

The overall situation was confused. The Army had no idea of how many mutants were still at large. Some had gone into hiding, and dressed as earthlings, they were impossible to identify by appearance.

A group of civilians had reported one mutant in custody. They had been told to knock him unconscious and keep him unconscious until further word.

Since all radio and television transmitters were in use, it was impossible to solicit aid from the great body of civilians — most of whom, indeed, knew nothing as yet of the invasion; most of whom were jamming switchboards with angry calls aimed at determining why their television sets weren't working. The official explanation, issued by the stations themselves, was sunspots.

The general listened quietly.

"Break it to the press," he said at last. "Ask that all civilians cooperate."

The Pentagon resumed the report. It was estimated that more than

eight hundred saucers had already landed across the planet. There was only a little information so far from foreign countries, all of whom had been alerted. Russia had reported nineteen mutants captured. England reported two. France—

"Thanks," the general said.

THE Elder detected the interference when a control needle on the frequency transmitter began to jump erratically. Instantly he checked the displacement coupling. There was nothing wrong with it. The frequency was being properly transmitted.

He was petrified with terror. His eyes glazed. His tentacles hung limp. Breath gurgled in his body; bubbled and rattled and rasped.

Then, leadenly, he moved one tentacle.

****Conference!**** he shrieked to his colleagues. ****Conference,**** he sobbed brokenly.

Circuits opened up; the Elder gave them his knowledge.

They had no difficulty in deducing the general picture of what was happening on Earth.

Walt failed,* they accused Forential.

****Save us, Elder! Save us!****

There was a hysterical babble of thought throughout the space station.

Forential raced down the ladder like a tumbling spider. He threw himself along the second level corridor. He stopped, gasping, before the frequency transmitter governing his charges.

erning his charges.

It still functioned perfectly.

The other aliens fled aimlessly through corridors, huddled in dark corners; they whimpered and moaned and waved their tentacles in terror.

****Make peace!**** one of them screamed shrilly.

****Surrender!****

****They'll kill us anyway! Don't be a fool!****

****No, no, no!****

Lycan embraced the Elder for protection. Trembling, he looked up into the Elder's contorted face. They both sobbed dryly.

Forential could not think. He was paralyzed.

It was almost half an hour before they quieted.

****My mutants aren't jammed,**** Forential told them for the dozenth time. ****Maybe there's still hope.****

****Send them all down; send them all—****

****No! Wait!**** Fierut interrupted sharply. ****Wait! Reason! Suppose there is interference on Forential's frequency. Suppose it just isn't strong enough for us to detect it. Suppose they're throwing most of their power into interfering with Lycan's transmitter. Suppose there is only local interference with Forential's. We've got to take that into account.****

Great hopeless whimpers echoed in their minds.

**** Wait, now, wait!**** Fierut commanded. ****We must assume it's true. But if we throw all available**

power into Forential's transmitter, maybe we can breach that purely local interference.**

**Yes? Yes? Yes?*

Lycan: cut off your transmitter. Channel every unit of power to Forential—

Madness—

**Suicide—!*

**They could change over—!*

There was a rising babble of protest.

Earth can't tell it's off! Fierut thought. **They must be using the two mutants down there for negative tests. They couldn't possibly have detection equipment for a displaced field.**

It's, it's our only *hope*, the Elder whispered.

FIERUT scuttled out of his compartment and down the ramp to the instrument room. He began to analyze and test and measure the beams of interference pouring from Earth. He used a synchronized model of the planet to pin-point originating sites. He traced the beams back, Earth transmitter by Earth transmitter, back to the originating site of least distortion and sharpest harmonics. **There!** he cried. **I have located their signal generator!**

All the power is now on Forential's transmitter, Lycan thought. **My transmitter is off.**

Send five of your charges down to destroy the signal generator! the Elder ordered Forential. **Hold the rest in reserve—in case of more

trouble—**

Forential dropped down the ladder to the rim level. He was chattering in nervous excitement.

Gasping painfully he selected five of his best mutants.

"Come!" he cried. "I will explain as we go. Traitors on Earth Walt is a traitor . . . Hurry!"

"I'll come too," Calvin cried eagerly. "I'll come too!"

"You stay here!" Forential ordered.

When the installation is destroyed, prepare to switch your transmitter back on again, Lycan, the Elder ordered. **If any of your mutants are alive, they can resume destruction.**

If all goes well, Forential thought, **we may yet succeed. I will reassign sectors among my remaining charges.**

Shortly five new saucer ships left the space station.

THE five saucers, in V-formation, careened into the atmosphere. They circled the planet, slowing. The leader peered at a floating needle in a spherical container of liquid. The needle vibrated in answer to the beam of interference it was attuned to. The silver tip wobbled back and forth across the target.

The ships leveled out over the Rocky Mountains. Losing altitude, they hurtled on a sloping trajectory toward Washington.

Across the Great Plains. Across the turgid, swollen Mississippi River. Across the Appalachians, worn and

old.

They slowed. The controls became more sluggish.

They hovered over Washington. The needle dipped.

Below, white and massive with afternoon sunlight, the Washington Monument, the tallest piece of masonry on the planet, loomed up between The Ellipse and the Tidal Basin, towering 555 feet into the air: standing rooted and solid and defiant.

Walt *felt* them.

"Mutants from my compartment!" he cried.

Instantly all activity in the laboratory ceased. It resumed almost immediately, pointless and frantic, now.

"They've been sent to destroy our signal generator," Dr. Norvel said matter of factly.

Technicians glanced anxiously at the suddenly unsubstantial walls. There was no protection. They were exposed as completely as if they were alone on a flat, barren tennis court of infinite dimensions.

"Cut off the transmitter!" the general ordered. "Find Walt's interference frequency!"

" . . . too late," Julia said. "We haven't time."

"We could be lucky!" the general insisted. "Pick a frequency range. Maybe we can hit the right one. Hurry up, for Christ's sake; you, there—!"

"But we can't cut the transmitter off," Dr. Norvel pleaded. "It would

release the other mutants. Give them even five minutes . . ."

"I can hold them off for awhile," Walt said. "I can shield myself from the radiations of the focus rod. All the mutants have to be able to. I think I can shield the building against them; I think I have the advantage of knowing more than they do. I don't know how long I can hold such an extended shield—Until they come in after me, I guess."

"We'll stop them," the general said. "We'll stop them at the door."

"You can't," Julia said. She was slowly rousing from her stupor. "They can displace."

"I can't hold off five of them long," Walt said. "Not and hold the shield."

"It would be a greater risk, cutting off Julia's frequency, searching for Walt's."

"But Julia could help him then!" the general said.

"No, because then those on *her* frequency would come after us. There's more of them." Dr. Norvel pressed her forehead wearily.

"We've got to do something."

Walt's voice cut through the confused babble. "I'm trying to reason with them."

" . . . he hears their thoughts," Julia whispered.

Activity ceased. Breathing seemed to cease.

Walt stood erect, motionless, grim. His body was taut. His eyes were bright with tension.

Your focus rods can't penetrate!

be called to them.

He braced the shielding against another assault. It came and passed. *I can hold the shielding as long as you can!*

We'll come in and kill you. There's five of us.

Friends, it's me. Walt.

Traitor!

No! No, I'm not!

Lies!

Let me—Listen! Forential lied! I, I can prove it! how?

Hell with him!

No, wait! one of the five insisted sharply. Walt didn't catch who.

He could hear them in conference.

THEN one blocked out the whole conversation and held it blocked out. A moment later, the block faltered and faded. Walt felt uneasy. What had they said? Some trick?

We do know Walt, after all. We may as well listen.

He's a traitor.

Wait. If he has proof—!

He couldn't have: It's Lyrian lies!

Give me a chance! Walt pleaded. *I know you all. Give me a chance. What can you lose?*

Forential said—

Give me a chance!

Let's hear him.

We owe him that.

Walt was sweating now. His hands were clenched into fists. He was almost certain that the argument was for his benefit: to make their seeming acquiescence less sus-

picious.

I'm coming out. One of you come to me.

Walt let out his breath. "There's a chance—" He went to the table and scooped up the birth certificates. "I hope one of these fits."

"Walt!" Julia cried. "If it doesn't!"

" . . . they were my friends," he said. "I was raised with them. Maybe they'll believe me anyway. Bob and Jim and Dave and Reg and Willy " Walt shrugged.

He crossed to the doorway. He left the laboratory.

Just outside he waited. One of the five saucer ships approached. He could see Julia's face at the window. It was drawn and pathetic. He wanted to go back and comfort her and tell her everything was going to be all right.

How sweet she was! Now that she was no longer infinitely wise and superior, now that she was dependent and helpless; how sweet she was!

He wanted to protect her. His heart swelled with sadness and with joy.

The saucer ship hovered. He motioned it closer. It drew in toward him like a nervous colt.

He waited.

He motioned it closer.

At last, just in front of him, it jolted down.

Willy got out.

Walt watched as the horror of openness flickered across his face.

You'll get used to it, Walt thought.

You'll like it, when you get used to it.

Willy clutched the side of the ship for support. *I'm, I'm all right, inside the ship . . . You come inside.* He clambered back out of sight.

Caution counseled refusal. But Walt approached the entrance. His increased knowledge made him confident. He had learned much—just in the last day. He was more than a match for a single mutant from the space station. If he had known as much last Monday as he knew now, Julia would never have escaped. He entered.

Willy pulled the door closed. He was breathing heavily.

Take off your shoes! Walt commanded. Walt knew Willy was going to try to start the ship, try to move it away so that Walt's shield would no longer cover the laboratory. Once that happened, the mutants on the outside could blast the laboratory in a second.

What?

Slowly, Willy was moving the starting lever by teleportation. Walt located the focus rod.

Take your shoes off!

SUSPICIOUSLY Willy glanced back mentally at the other saucer ships a short distance behind. Willy hesitated. Then he sat down and removed his shoes. He watched Walt closely. The starting lever continued to inch into position.

Walt knew Willy wouldn't risk a sudden motion.

But Walt was wrong. As he

bent down, the lever snapped in place. The saucer shuddered.

And Walt, using the focus rod for power, fuzed the control panel in an instant beyond all use. Before the other mutants could strike, his extended shielding was back around himself and the laboratory.

You're going to listen, Walt told him calmly. All of you. You're an earthling. Every one of you. You were born here of Earth parents.

Nonsense!

It's true. You shut up!

Willy waited, uncertain. The others were equally uncertain. They had not been prepared for a failure in their initial plan.

I have proof. Right here. Walt thought all the details to the mutants as rapidly and as sincerely as he could. His face was bloodless. His hand was shaking. The strain of holding the shielding was beginning to tell on him.

Only two birth certificates were left. I've got to make them see that Forential had lied to them! he thought.

The mutants were thinking the situation over in privacy, agreeing on a new course of action.

And there it was!

Wonder of wonders, the last birth certificate was Willy's!

See! See! Walt thought excitedly. *This proves what I was telling you! Look! All of you! They're the same!*

It proves nothing, Bob thought..

It's faked.

Is that the best you have to offer?

one of them sneered.

Let's kill him! Get it over with!

How could I fake it? Walt demanded. He realized now what a pathetic hope it had been. He needed time; given that, the birth certificates would be very helpful in convincing them. But without time, he couldn't give them all the background they needed. And they weren't going to give him time.

Lyrian traitor!

You can't hold us all off, Walt. We're going to kill you.

Walt saw them—saw them mentally—landing their four ships. In a few minutes they would be upon him.

He began to tremble in impotent rage. He backed toward the door to escape from the confining walls. He tried to make his shielding even stronger against their focus rods.

Julia, waiting in the laboratory, heard her heart beating loudly and rapidly. The one saucer had landed. Walt had boarded it. The four were drifting, waiting. There was a hum from the signal generator behind her. Let him be all right, let him beat them off! she prayed.

What's happening? How can I help?

Perhaps because her mind was so fatigued that it was almost functioning on the automatic level of sleep, she realized at last why the two compartments in the space station had been kept separate. After the second wave of mutants destroyed the first — under the impression they were the Earth survivors of a

war—the aliens would silence the second frequency transmitter. Earth would be populated by less than thirty male mutants. The race of man would not breed back. In a few years, the planet would be ready for its conquerors.

I wish I could tell Walt that, she thought. Maybe it would be of some help to him.

The four saucers landed.

She bent forward tensely.

Has he convinced them? Are they coming out to surrender?

CHAPTER XII

WALT was outside the ship. His feet planted firmly, he waited. The four advancing mutants were not yet adjusted to the space disorientation. Behind them, the tip of the Washington Monument loomed starkly white above the trees.

Walt's anger rose to an even greater fury. He knew how Julia had felt as a child: the hot, impotent flare of rage; the senseless desire to throw something; to smash and destroy something; to disprove helplessness by some savage action.

The mutants were closer; terror was dying out of their eyes. Their lips were relaxing. Their bodies were loosening to their wills.

We're going to kill you, Walt: with our hands.

Lyrian traitor.

Walt was breathing in shallow gasps. They would rush him in a minute. Willy, out of the saucer

ship now, crouched only yards away, ready to spring. He fainted, and Walt flinched instinctively.

*You can't displace from five of us!
Not and hold the shielding, traitor!*

General Tibbets, in the doorway behind Walt, began firing at the mutants with a pistol.

Bob clutched at his chest and staggered. In an instant, the others were displaced and invulnerable.

Bob fell.

Reg went to his wounded companion, held him in displacement, healed him rapidly.

Bob coughed and shook his head and scrambled to his feet. He screamed his hate at the general.

The pistol clicked on an empty chamber.

Walt retreated several steps.

*. . . green wartle rivers of Lyria;
birdsong, there, in a skybranch, partly
pretty orange and soft like fur
pictures*

He was in Calvin's mind!

Calvin was sitting in the games space, on the floor, rolling the metal practice ball back and forth before him between his hairy hands. Forential was speaking. The confining walls of the space station were so comfortingly solid

And Walt had a fix on it! Knew its position, its direction, its speed! He had an anchor!

Where is something? he thought wildly. Quick! A rock! Throw a rock! Something big: to throw: quick! Huge, heavy—

FORGOTTEN, the advancing mutants. With every unit and sub unit and compartment and section of his mind, pouring out every available degree of telepathic power, dropping the shielding, concentrating above everything else, he seized the Washington Monument. It shook; it wobbled unsteadily; it wrenched free.

Calvin, delighted, was helping him.

*Walt! he cried. We'll play games!
We'll throw it!*

It was off the ground. It poised uncertainly. It moved upward. Slowly at first, like a rocket: faster and faster, dwindling from Earth, becoming a vanishing pinpoint like a black, daylight star.

Calvin pulled it in with childish joy. *It's big!* he cried proudly.

It was aimed on target.

Calvin was no longer in Walt's mind.

With a last, exhausting burst of thought, he increased its already terrific speed. The laboratory still stood. The mutants had not realized his shielding was down. He restored it, weakened and quivering.

And they were upon him. He fought them off with his fists and elbows. He dared not displace, lest the shielding should crumble entirely. A few minutes more; if I can just gain a few minutes more, he thought.

He was down. He jerked his head out of the way of a foot. He caught a leg and twisted.

Fingers tore at his throat. He

caught someone with a savage and satisfying kick.

Out in space, beyond the orbit of the moon, Fierut detected the Washington Monument on his warning device. It was coming too fast to deflect. He tried.

A heartbeat later, it ripped into the steel of the space station. It crumbled and shattered and sprayed marble, and huge fragments erupted from the opposite side. The space station became visible. There was a great, ragged, tunneling hole from rim to rim. Escaping air spewed wreckage into space. Parts of demolished machinery whirled away. In a yet-sealed compartment, a power system exploded with a great, blinding, soundless flash. Chunks of steel debris, vast shrapnel, blossomed in all directions.

The space station, its orbit altered, twisted away, a gutted, lifeless derelict.

Walt's shielding collapsed. His mutant bridge opened; his mutant powers vanished. He screamed for help.

He saw General Tibbets slam a pistol butt against Willy's suddenly unprotected skull.

FIVE minutes later, in the laboratory, amid incredible confusion, Julia stood over Walt and dabbed antiseptic on his cut, swollen lip.

Throughout the room there were shouts and laughter and cries of victory. One of the technicians—one who had worked hardest over it—was joyfully smashing the sec-

ond signal generator.

In the center of the frenzy, Dr. Norvel sat slumped across the desk. She was sound asleep.

Weary and proud, Julia straightened up from Walt.

"I've — we've both — got to get some rest," she said. "There'll be the press, the TV, the radio . . . I can't face them. I'm too tired . . . I must look like something the cat dragged in . . ."

Walt, heavy lidded and exhausted, looked up at her. He smiled leadenly. "Look fine, Julia." His voice was thick and indistinct because of the swelling of his tongue.

She sure ran me around, he thought. But she can't now. She's not superior to me any more. I'll be able to hold my own. She's, she's so helpless, so pliant. That's the way I like her. Poor tired girl!

We'll travel, he thought. I want to see all of the planet. All the sights, all the cities. I want to live in the bustle of its life, in the hurry of its crowds. I want to travel and learn all the different smells and experience all the different places, and I want to celebrate its richness and its newness; I want to devour it; I want to—

She'll be there; I want to feel her by my side: sweet Julia, so compliant, waiting my decisions and anticipating my wishes. I want to see her laugh. And I want . . . I want

I'll have to ask her about things like that.

. . . I'm no longer so innocent, but

I'm not yet so wise. I have grown and matured marvelously, and I will further: I know what I want. And she'll be there to, to help me see and do and

He felt a great warm glow of bursting and bubbling emotions.

"I'm going to sleep twenty-four hours," Julia said. "Just as soon as I can get in bed."

"Better leave before the fourth estate gets here," the general said. "I'll have the staff car drive you back to the hotel."

"Don't tell anybody we're there."

The general nodded. He took Julia's arm. "I'll walk you outside." He sent an orderly for the car.

"When you're rested—" he let Walt and Julia go through the door in front of him—"when you're rested, we'll want to see both of you again. You said something, Julia, about making us all like you were: with all those unusual abilities?"

"Later. Please, later. I'm just too tired to think." She held onto Walt's arm possessively.

But do, she wondered, *do* I remember enough details to enable a surgeon to install a bridge?

A WELTER of other thoughts and impressions seethed to the surface of her leaden brain: The international situation if nothing changes for the last few years, there is an equilibrium. Working for genuine peace. War is farther off every year. But to interfere? When people can still be convinced of so many, so many

falsehoods? Patterns of hatred (like of superstition), are they (aren't they: who can say? would the bridge not join but divide, upset the equilibrium?) are the patterns of hatred too deep, and too dangerous, and too entrenched in our generation?

She was tired; but out of the exhaustion, the weariness, the fatigue, she suddenly realized with startling clarity, like the chime of a great, flawless bell, ringing hope and promise: That it will come; the next development of man will come, lies waiting in the future (near or far) to be born, to be born: will come. When mankind is ready, it will come: will come.

A wave of exultation filled her. Oh, be ready soon! she cried. Be ready soon!

"I, I don't think I can, can be of any help on that, General," she said.

"After you get some rest—"

"No," she said. Did she remember enough to guide a surgeon? "No, I'm afraid I've forgotten too thoroughly."

The general helped them into the car.

She snuggled over against Walt. She didn't want to think at all. She dreaded the next few days. She wished they were over.

She pulled Walt's head down and kissed his swollen lips. He tried to draw back in surprise. She held on. The car began to move. He resisted and then relaxed and then cooperated. She was deliriously in

love with him.

Drifting to sleep she thought: After next week, we'll be able to get away and go home. We'll settle down right away. We'll buy the Castle Place; he can fix it up and work around the yard in the evenings, and I'll put pink and white curtains in the kitchen. And there's Beck's Hardware Store. I'll have to see about making the down payment on it the first day we get back.

There will be Saturday teas. Walt will look stunningly handsome in a double breasted suit in Church on Sunday

movies twice a week

dancing once a month . . . I'll let him go moose hunting in Canada every single year if he wants to.

She snuggled closer.

He's so innocent, she thought. He'll have to be educated (not so much as the other mutants, because he's already learned a little): but not more than it is good a husband should be.

My, she thought, feeling his arms around her. My, he has *strong* muscles.

But he won't be any trouble. He'll handle like a lamb. I can manage him.

She smiled and was asleep.

THE END

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The Test Of Time

OF all the Seven Wonders of the World, only the Pyramids remain to testify to the greatness and grandeur of ancient civilizations. Anyone acquainted with modern engineering feats tends to pooh-pooh the Pyramids as simply an outmoded pile of stone—but such an attitude is grossly wrong—even by today's exacting standards the Pyramids remain one of the wonders of the modern as well as ancient world.

Reams have been written on the precise engineering of the Pyramids, on the immense labor that went into their construction, on the enormous mass of stone that was used; still it is hard to appreciate just what was accomplished—futilely or not—when these monuments to Pharaohs were built.

Very few things, contrary to most

opinion, compare in size with the Pyramids. In fact only a few dams and a few excavation-dumps from mines compare in sheer bulk with the Pyramids. The big dams in our own West and a few European and Asiatic dams have masses as great as the bulk of the Pyramids. Mine excavations here and in South Africa also have piled up masses of material ten or fifteen times as bulky as the masses of the Pyramids—over many, many decades.

Contemplation of these facts, points out that the ancient Egyptians accomplished in their cruel and barbarous way, a feat worthy of anyone's imagination, for when a lot of modern works become dust, the Pyramids will still exist, standing proud and haughty in their eternal watch over the Nile.

★ Undersea Eye ★

TWO hundred and eighty-five feet below the surface of the icy English Channel, a steel cylinder the size of a hot water tank and faced with a huge quartz eye, swings slowly to and fro at the end of its cable. No sound is heard and nothing disturbs the monstrous orb, except the gentle nudgings of the current.

Overhead a man stares at a screen. It is murky and dim, occasionally illuminated by shadowy pictures of sunken wrecks and slowly rising columns of disturbed silt. Suddenly, very clearly, the unmistakable outlines of a periscope and conning tower can be seen and a moment later a single English word printed on steel, drifts into view. It reads: *Affray*.

In such a coldly, scientifically dra-

matic way, British engineers have begun to probe the bottom of the sea with television cameras, going into regions and depths and conditions difficult or impossible for divers to face. Science fiction has been caught up with again!

A television camera encased in a pressure resistant steel drum, provided with powerful lights and suspended from a steel cable carrying electrical conductors and coaxial cables, the "undersea eye" is science's newest method of exploration. Perhaps now the oft-told legend of Atlantis and Mu can be confirmed, for these hoary lands are reputed to exist at depths impossible for humans to attain. The wonders of the ocean depths are soon to be revealed by the undersea eye . .



PIPER IN THE WOODS

By

Philip K. Dick

Earth maintained an important garrison on Asteroid Y-3. Now suddenly it was imperiled with a biological impossibility — men becoming plants!

“WELL, Corporal Westerbург,” Doctor Henry Harris said gently, “just why do you think you’re a plant?”

As he spoke, Harris glanced down again at the card on his desk. It was from the Base Commander himself, made out in Cox’s heavy scrawl: *Doc, this is the lad I told*

you about. Talk to him and try to find out how he got this delusion. He’s from the new Garrison, the new check station on Asteroid Y-3, and we don’t want anything to go wrong there. Especially a silly damn thing like this!

Harris pushed the card aside and stared back up at the youth across



the desk from him. The young man seemed ill at ease and appeared to be avoiding answering the question Harris had put to him. Harris frowned. Westerburg was a good looking chap, actually handsome in his Patrol uniform, a shock of blond hair over one eye. He was tall, almost six feet, a fine healthy lad, just two years out of Training, according to the card. Born in Detroit. Had measles when he was nine. Interested in jet engines, tennis, and girls. Twenty-six years old.

"Well, Corporal Westerburg," Doctor Harris said again. "Why do you think you're a plant?"

The Corporal looked up shyly. He cleared his throat. "Sir, I *am* a plant, I don't just think so. I've been a plant for several days, now."

"I see." The Doctor nodded. "You mean that you weren't always a plant?"

"No sir. I just became a plant recently."

"And what were you before you became a plant?"

"Well, sir, I was just like the rest of you."

There was silence. Doctor Harris took up his pen and scratched a few lines, but nothing of importance came. A plant? And such a healthy-looking lad! Harris removed his steel-rimmed glasses and polished them with his handkerchief. He put them on again and leaned back in his chair. "Care for a cigarette, Corporal?"

"No, sir."

The Doctor lit one himself, rest-

ing his arm on the edge of the chair. "Corporal, you must realize that there are very few men who become plants, especially on such short notice. I have to admit you are the first person who has ever told me such a thing."

"Yes sir, I realize it's quite rare."

"You can understand why I'm interested, then. When you say you're a plant, you mean you're not capable of mobility? Or do you mean you're a vegetable, as opposed to an animal? Or just what?"

The Corporal looked away. "I can't tell you any more," he murmured. "I'm sorry, sir."

"Well, would you mind telling me *how* you became a plant?"

Corporal Westerburg hesitated. He stared down at the floor, then out the window at the spaceport, then at a fly on the desk. At last he stood up, getting slowly to his feet. "I can't even tell you that, sir," he said.

"You can't? Why not?"

"Because—because I promised not to."

THE room was silent. Doctor Harris rose, too, and they both stood facing each other. Harris frowned, rubbing his jaw. "Corporal, just *who* did you promise?"

"I can't even tell you that, sir. I'm sorry."

The Doctor considered this. At last he went to the door and opened it. "All right, Corporal. You may go now. And thanks for your time."

"I'm sorry I'm not more helpful."

The Corporal went slowly out and

Harris closed the door after him. Then he went across his office to the vidphone. He rang Commander Cox's letter. A moment later the beefy good-natured face of the Base Commander appeared.

"Cox, this is Harris. I talked to him, all right. All I could get is the statement that he's a plant. What else is there? What kind of behavior pattern?"

"Well," Cox said, "the first thing they noticed was that he wouldn't do any work. The Garrison Chief reported that this Westerborg would wander off outside the Garrison and just sit, all day long. Just sit."

"In the sun?"

"Yes. Just sit in the sun. Then at nightfall he would come back in. When they asked why he wasn't working in the jet repair building he told them he had to be out in the sun. Then he said—" Cox hesitated.

"Yes? Said what?"

"He said that work was unnatural. That it was a waste of time. That the only worthwhile thing was to sit and contemplate—outside."

"What then?"

"Then they asked him how he got that idea, and then he revealed to them that he had become a plant."

"I'm going to have to talk to him again, I can see," Harris said. "And he's applied for a permanent discharge from the Patrol? What reason did he give?"

"The same, that he's a plant now, and has no more interest in being a Patrolman. All he wants to do is sit in the sun. It's the damndest

thing I ever heard."

"All right. I think I'll visit him in his quarters." Harris looked at his watch. "I'll go over after dinner."

"Good luck," Cox said gloomily. "But who ever heard of a man turning into a plant? We told him it wasn't possible, but he just smiled at us."

"I'll let you know how I make out," Harris said.

HARRIS walked slowly down the hall. It was after six; the evening meal was over. A dim concept was coming into his mind, but it was much too soon to be sure. He increased his pace, turning right at the end of the hall. Two nurses passed, hurrying by. Westerborg was quartered with a buddy, a man who had been injured in a jet blast and who was now almost recovered. Harris came to the dorm wing and stopped, checking the numbers on the doors.

"Can I help you, sir?" the robot attendant said, gliding up.

"I'm looking for Corporal Westerborg's room."

"Three doors to the right."

Harris went on. Asteroid Y-3 had only recently been garrisoned and staffed. It had become the primary check-point to halt and examine ships entering the system from outer space. The Garrison made sure that no dangerous bacteria, fungus, or what-not arrived to infect the system. A nice asteroid it was, warm, well-watered, with trees and lakes and lots of sunlight. And the

most modern Garrison in the nine planets. He shook his head, coming to the third door. He stopped, raising his hand and knocking.

"Who's there?" sounded through the door.

"I want to see Corporal Westerburg."

The door opened. A bovine youth with horn-rimmed glasses looked out, a book in his hand. "Who are you?"

"Doctor Harris."

"I'm sorry, sir. Corporal Westerburg is asleep."

"Would he mind if I woke him up? I want very much to talk to him." Harris peered inside. He could see a neat room, with a desk, a rug and lamp, and two bunks. On one of the bunks was Westerburg, lying face up, his arms folded across his chest, his eyes tightly closed.

"Sir," the bovine youth said, "I'm afraid I can't wake him up for you, much as I'd like to."

"You can't? Why not?"

"Sir, Corporal Westerburg won't wake up, not after the sun sets. He just won't. He can't be wakened."

"Cataleptic? Really?"

"But in the morning, as soon as the sun comes up, he leaps out of bed and goes outside. Stays the whole day."

"I see," the Doctor said. "Well, thanks anyhow." He went back out into the hall and the door shut after him. "There's more to this than I realized," he murmured. He went on back the way he had come.

IT was a warm sunny day. The sky was almost free of clouds and a gentle wind moved through the cedars along the bank of the stream. There was a path leading from the hospital building down the slope to the stream. At the stream a small bridge led over to the other side, and a few patients were standing on the bridge, wrapped in their bathrobes, looking aimlessly down at the water.

It took Harris several minutes to find Westerburg. The youth was not with the other patients, near or around the bridge. He had gone farther down, past the cedar trees and out onto a strip of bright meadow, where poppies and grass grew everywhere. He was sitting on the stream bank, on a flat grey stone, leaning back and staring up, his mouth open a little. He did not notice the Doctor until Harris was almost beside him.

"Hello," Harris said softly.

Westerburg opened his eyes, looking up. He smiled and got slowly to his feet, a graceful, flowing motion that was rather surprising for a man of his size. "Hello, Doctor. What brings you out here?"

"Nothing. Thought I'd get some sun."

"Here, you can share my rock." Westerburg moved over and Harris sat down gingerly, being careful not to catch his trousers on the sharp edges of the rock. He lit a cigarette and gazed silently down at the water. Beside him, Westerburg had resumed his strange position, lean-

ing back, resting on his hands, staring up with his eyes shut tight.

"Nice day," the Doctor said.

"Yes."

"Do you come here every day?"

"Yes."

"You like it better out here than inside."

"I can't stay inside," Westerburg said.

"You can't? How do you mean, 'can't'?"

"You would die without *air*, wouldn't you?" the Corporal said.

"And you'd die without sunlight?"

Westerburg nodded.

"Corporal, may I ask you something? Do you plan to do this the rest of your life, sit out in the sun on a flat rock? Nothing else?"

Westerburg nodded.

"How about your job? You went to school for years to become a Patrolman. You wanted to enter the Patrol very badly. You were given a fine rating and a first-class position. How do you feel, giving all that up? You know, it won't be easy to get back in again. Do you realize that?"

"I realize it."

"And you're really going to give it all up?"

"That's right."

HARRIS was silent for awhile. At last he put his cigarette out and turned toward the youth. "All right, let's say you give up your job and sit in the sun. Well, what happens, then? Someone else has

to do the job instead of you. Isn't that true? The job has to be done, *your* job has to be done. And if you don't do it someone else has to."

"I suppose so."

"Westerburg, suppose everyone felt the way you do? Suppose everyone wanted to sit in the sun all day? What would happen? No one would check ships coming from outer space. Bacteria and toxic crystals would enter the system and cause mass death and suffering. Isn't that right?"

"If everyone felt the way I do they wouldn't be going into outer space."

"But they have to. They have to trade, they have to get minerals and products and new plants."

"Why?"

"To keep society going."

"Why?"

"Well—" Harris gestured. "People couldn't live without society."

Westerburg said nothing to that. Harris watched him, but the youth did not answer.

"Isn't that right?" Harris said.

"Perhaps. It's a peculiar business, Doctor. You know, I struggled for years to get through Training. I had to work and pay my own way. Washed dishes, worked in kitchens. Studied at night, learned, crammed, worked on and on. And you know what I think, now?"

"What?"

"I wish I'd become a plant earlier."

Doctor Harris stood up. "Westerburg, when you come inside, will

you stop off at my office? I want to give you a few tests, if you don't mind."

"The shock box?" Westerburg smiled. "I knew that would be coming around. Sure, I don't mind."

Nettled, Harris left the rock, walking back up the bank a short distance. "About three, Corporal?"

The Corporal nodded.

Harris made his way up the hill, to the path, toward the hospital building. The whole thing was beginning to become more clear to him. A boy who had struggled all his life. Financial insecurity. Idealized goal, getting a Patrol assignment. Finally reached it, found the load too great. And on Asteroid Y-3 there was too much vegetation to look at all day. Primitive identification and projection on the flora of the asteroid. Concept of security involved in immobility and permanence. Unchanging forest.

He entered the building. A robot orderly stopped him almost at once. "Sir, Commander Cox wants you urgently, on the vidphone."

"Thanks." Harris strode to his office. He dialed Cox's letter and the Commander's face came presently into focus. "Cox? This is Harris. I've been out talking to the boy. I'm beginning to get this lined up, now. I can see the pattern, too much load too long. Finally gets what he wants and the idealization shatters under the—"

"Harris!" Cox barked. "Shut up and listen. I just got a report from Y-3. They're sending an express

rocket here. It's on the way."

"An express rocket?"

"Five more cases like Westerburg. All say they're plants! The Garrison Chief is worried as hell. Says we *must* find out what it is or the Garrison will fall apart, right away. Do you get me, Harris? Find out what it is!"

"Yes, sir," Harris murmured.

"Yes, sir."

BY the end of the week there were twenty cases, and all, of course, were from Asteroid Y-3.

Commander Cox and Harris stood together at the top of the hill, looking gloomily down at the stream below. Sixteen men and four women sat in the sun along the bank, none of them moving, none speaking. An hour had gone by since Cox and Harris appeared, and in all that time the twenty people below had not stirred.

"I don't get it," Cox said, shaking his head. "I just absolutely don't get it. Harris, is this the beginning of the end? Is everything going to start cracking around us? It gives me a hell of a strange feeling to see those people down there, basking away in the sun, just sitting and basking."

"Who's that man there with the red hair?"

"That's Ulrich Deutsch. He was Second in Command at the Garrison. Now look at him! Sits and dozes with his mouth open and his eyes shut. A week ago that man was climbing, going right up to the

top. When the Garrison Chief retires he was supposed to take over. Maybe another year, at the most. All his life he's been climbing to get up there."

"And now he sits in the sun," Harris finished.

"That woman. The brunette, with the short hair. Career woman. Head of the entire office staff of the Garrison. And the man beside her. Janitor. And that cute little gal there, with the bosom. Secretary, just out of school. All kinds. And I got a note this morning, three more coming in sometime today."

Harris nodded. "The strange thing is—they really *want* to sit down there. They're completely rational; they could do something else, but they just don't care to."

"Well?" Cox said. "What are you going to do? Have you found anything? We're counting on you. Let's hear it."

"I couldn't get anything out of them directly," Harris said, "but I've had some interesting results with the shock box. Let's go inside and I'll show you."

"Fine," Cox turned and started toward the hospital. "Show me anything you've got. This is serious. Now I know how Tiberius felt when Christianity showed up in high places."

HARRIS snapped off the light. The room was pitch black. "I'll run this first reel for you. The subject is one of the best biologists

stationed at the Garrison. Robert Bradshaw. He came in yesterday. I got a good run from the shock box because Bradshaw's mind is so highly differentiated. There's a lot of repressed material of a non-rational nature, more than usual."

He pressed a switch. The projector whirled, and on the far wall a three-dimensional image appeared in color, so real that it might have been the man himself. Robert Bradshaw was a man of fifty, heavy-set, with iron grey hair and a square jaw. He sat in the chair calmly, his hands resting on the arms, oblivious to the electrodes attached to his neck and wrist. "There I go," Harris said. "Watch."

His film-image appeared, approaching Bradshaw. "Now, Mr. Bradshaw," his image said, "this won't hurt you at all, and it'll help us a lot." The image rotated the controls on the shock box. Bradshaw stiffened, and his jaw set, but otherwise he gave no sign. The image of Harris regarded him for a time and then stepped away from the controls.

"Can you hear me, Mr. Bradshaw?" the image asked.

"Yes."

"What is your name?"

"Robert C. Bradshaw."

"What is your position?"

"Chief Biologist at the check-station on Y-3."

"Are you there now?"

"No, I'm back on Terra. In a hospital."

"Why?"

"Because I admitted to the Garrison Chief that I had become a plant,"

"Is that true? That you are a plant."

"Yes, in a non-biological sense. I retain the physiology of a human being, of course."

"What do you mean, then, that you're a plant?"

"The reference is to attitudinal response, to Weltanschauung."

"Go on."

"It is possible for a warm-blooded animal, an upper primate, to adopt the psychology of a plant, to some extent."

"Yes?"

"I refer to this."

"And the others? They refer to this also?"

"Yes."

"How did this occur, your adopting this attitude?"

Bradshaw's image hesitated, the lips twisting. "See?" Harris said to Cox. "Strong conflict. He wouldn't have gone on, if he had been fully conscious."

"I—"

"Yes?"

"I was taught to become a plant."

The image of Harris showed surprise and interest. "What do you mean, you were *taught* to become a plant?"

"They realized my problems and taught me to become a plant. Now I'm free from them, the problems."

"Who? Who taught you?"

"The Pipers."

"Who? The Pipers? Who are

the Pipers?"

There was no answer.

"Mr. Bradshaw, who are the Pipers?"

After a long, agonized pause, the heavy lips parted. "They live in the woods ."

Harris snapped off the projector, and the lights came on. He and Cox blinked. "That was all I could get," Harris said. "But I was lucky to get that. He wasn't supposed to tell, not at all. That was the thing they all promised not to do, tell who taught them to become plants. The Pipers who live in the woods, on Asteroid Y-3."

"You got this story from all twenty?"

"No." Harris grimaced. "Most of them put up too much fight. I couldn't even get *this* much from them."

Cox reflected. "The Pipers. Well? What do you propose to do? Just wait around until you can get the full story? Is that your program?"

"No," Harris said. "Not at all. I'm going to Y-3 and find out who the Pipers are, myself."

THE small patrol ship made its landing with care and precision, its jets choking into final silence. The hatch slid back and Doctor Henry Harris found himself staring out at a field, a brown, sun-baked landing field. At the end of the field was a tall signal tower. Around the field on all sides were long grey buildings, the Garrison check-station itself. Not far off a huge Ve-

nusian cruiser was parked, a vast green hulk, like an enormous lime. The technicians from the station were swarming all over it, checking and examining each inch of it for lethal life-forms and poisons that might have attached themselves to the hull.

"All out, sir," the pilot said.

Harris nodded. He took hold of his two suitcases and stepped carefully down. The ground was hot underfoot, and he blinked in the bright sunlight. Jupiter was in the sky, and the vast planet reflected considerable sunlight down onto the asteroid.

Harris started across the field, carrying his suitcases. A field attendant was already busy opening the storage compartment of the Patrol ship, extracting his trunk. The attendant lowered the trunk into a waiting dolly and came after him, manipulating the little truck with bored skill.

As Harris came to the entrance of the signal tower the gate slid back and a man came forward, an older man, large and robust, with white hair and a steady walk.

"How are you, Doctor?" he said, holding his hand out. "I'm Lawrence Watts, the Garrison Chief."

They shook hands. Watts smiled down at Harris. He was a huge old man, still regal and straight in his dark blue uniform, with his gold epaulets sparkling on his shoulders.

"Have a good trip?" Watts asked. "Come on inside and I'll have a

drink fixed for you. It gets hot around here, with the Big Mirror up there."

"Jupiter?" Harris followed him inside the building. The signal tower was cool and dark, a welcome relief. "Why is the gravity so near Terra's? I expected to go flying off like a kangaroo. Is it artificial?"

"No. There's a dense core of some kind to the asteroid, some kind of metallic deposit. That's why we picked this asteroid out of all the others. It made the construction problem much simpler, and it also explains why the asteroid has natural air and water. Did you see the hills?"

"The hills?"

"When we get up higher in the tower we'll be able to see over the buildings. There's quite a natural park here, a regular little forest, complete with everything you'd want. Come in here, Harris. This is my office." The old man strode at quite a clip, around the corner and into a large, well-furnished apartment. "Isn't this pleasant? I intend to make my last year here as amiable as possible." He frowned. "Of course, with Deutsch gone, I may be here forever. Oh, well." He shrugged. "Sit down, Harris."

"Thanks." Harris took a chair, stretching his legs out. He watched Watts as he closed the door to the hall. "By the way, any more cases come up?"

"Two more today," Watts was grim. "Makes almost thirty, in all. We have three hundred men in this

station. At the rate it's going—"

"Chief, you spoke about a forest on the asteroid. Do you allow the crew to go into the forest at will? Or do you restrict them to the buildings and grounds?"

WATTS rubbed his jaw. "Well, it's a difficult situation, Harris. I have to let the men leave the grounds sometimes. They can see the forest from the buildings, and as long as you can see a nice place to stretch out and relax that does it. Once every ten days they have a full period of rest. Then they go out and fool around."

"And then it happens?"

"Yes, I suppose so. But as long as they can see the forest they'll want to go. I can't help it."

"I know. I'm not censuring you. Well, what's your theory? What happens to them out there? What do they do?"

"What happens? Once they get out there and take it easy for awhile they don't want to come back and work. It's boondoggling. Playing hookey. They don't want to work, so off they go."

"How about this business of their delusions?"

Watts laughed good-naturedly. "Listen, Harris. You know as well as I do that's a lot of poppycock. They're no more plants than you or I. They just don't want to work, that's all. When I was a cadet we had a few ways to make people work. I wish we could lay a few on their backs, like we used to."

"You think this is simple gold-bricking, then?"

"Don't you think it is?"

"No," Harris said. "They really believe they're plants. I put them through the high-frequency shock treatment, the shock box. The whole nervous system is paralyzed, all inhibitions stopped cold. They tell the truth, then. And they said the same thing—and more."

Watts paced back and forth, his hands clasped behind his back. "Harris, you're a doctor, and I suppose you know what you're talking about. But look at the situation here. We have a garrison, a good modern garrison. We're probably the most modern outfit in the system. Every new device and gadget is here that science can produce. Harris, this garrison is one vast machine. The men are parts, and each has his job, the Maintenance Crew, the Biologists, the Office Crew, the Managerial Staff.

"Look what happens when one person steps away from his job. Everything else begins to creak. We can't service the bugs if no one services the machines. We can't order food to feed the crews if no one makes out reports, takes inventories. We can't direct any kind of activity if the Second in Command decides to go out and sit in the sun all day.

"Thirty people, one tenth of the Garrison. But we can't run without them. The Garrison is built that way. If you take the supports out the whole building falls. No one can leave. We're all tied here,

and these people know it. They know they have no right to do that, run off on their own. No one has that right anymore. We're all too tightly interwoven to suddenly start doing what we want. It's unfair to the rest, the majority."

HARRIS nodded. "Chief, can I ask you something?"

"What is it?"

"Are there any inhabitants on the asteroid? Any natives?"

"Natives?" Watts considered. "Yes, there's some kind of aborigines living out there." He waved vaguely toward the window.

"What are they like? Have you seen them?"

"Yes, I've seen them. At least, I saw them when we first came here. They hung around for awhile, watching us, then after a time they disappeared."

"Did they die off? Diseases of some kind?"

"No. They just—just disappeared. Into their forest. They're still there, someplace."

"What kind of people are they?"

"Well, the story is that they're originally from Mars. They don't look much like Martians, though. They're dark, a kind of coppery color. Thin. Very agile, in their own way. They hunt and fish. No written language. We don't pay much attention to them."

"I see." Harris paused. "Chief, have you ever heard of anything called—The Pipers?"

"The Pipers?" Watts frowned.

"No. Why?"

"The patients mentioned something called The Pipers. According to Bradshaw, the Pipers taught him to become a plant. He learned it from them, a kind of teaching."

"The Pipers. What are they?"

"I don't know," Harris admitted. "I thought maybe you might know. My first assumption, of course, was that they're the natives. But now I'm not so sure, not after hearing your description of them."

"The natives are primitive savages. They don't have anything to teach anybody, especially a top-flight biologist."

Harris hesitated. "Chief, I'd like to go into the woods and look around. Is that possible?"

"Certainly. I can arrange it for you. I'll give you one of the men to show you around."

"I'd rather go alone. Is there any danger?"

"No, none that I know of. Except—"

"Except the Pipers," Harris finished. "I know. Well, there's only one way to find them, and that's it. I'll have to take my chances."

"If you walk in a straight line," Chief Watts said, "you'll find yourself back at the Garrison in about six hours. It's a damn small asteroid. There's a couple of streams and lakes, so don't fall in."

"How about snakes or poisonous insects?"

"Nothing like that reported. We did a lot of tramping around at

first, but it's grown back now, the way it was. We never encountered anything dangerous."

"Thanks, Chief," Harris said. They shook hands. "I'll see you before nightfall."

"Good luck." The Chief and his two armed escorts turned and went back across the rise, down the other side toward the Garrison. Harris watched them go until they disappeared inside the building. Then he turned and started into the grove of trees.

The woods were very silent around him as he walked. Trees towered up on all sides of him, huge dark-green trees like eucalyptus. The ground underfoot was soft with endless leaves that had fallen and rotted into soil. After awhile the grove of high trees fell behind and he found himself crossing a dry meadow, the grass and weeds burned brown in the sun. Insects buzzed around him, rising up from the dry weed-stalks. Something scuttled ahead, hurrying through the undergrowth. He caught sight of a grey ball with many legs, scampering furiously, its antennae weaving.

The meadow ended at the bottom of a hill. He was going up, now, going higher and higher. Ahead of him an endless expanse of green rose, acres of wild growth. He scrambled to the top finally, blowing and panting, catching his breath.

He went on. Now he was going down again, plunging into a deep gully. Tall ferns grew, as large as trees. He was entering a living

Jurassic forest, ferns that stretched out endlessly ahead of him. Down he went, walking carefully. The air began to turn cold around him. The floor of the gully was damp and silent; underfoot the ground was almost wet.

He came out on a level table. It was dark, with the ferns growing up on all sides, dense growths of ferns, silent and unmoving. He came upon a natural path, an old stream bed, rough and rocky, but easy to follow. The air was thick and oppressive. Beyond the ferns he could see the side of the next hill, a green field rising up.

Something grey was ahead. Rocks, piled-up boulders, scattered and stacked here and there. The stream bed led directly to them. Apparently this had been a pool of some kind, a stream emptying from it. He climbed the first of the boulders awkwardly, feeling his way up. At the top he paused, resting again.

As yet he had had no luck. So far he had not met any of the natives. It would be through them that he would find the mysterious Pipers that were stealing the men away, if such really existed. If he could find the natives, talk to them, perhaps he could find out something. But as yet he had been unsuccessful. He looked around. The woods were very silent. A slight breeze moved through the ferns, rustling them, but that was all. Where were the natives? Probably they had a settlement of some sort, huts, a clearing. The asteroid was small;

he should be able to find them by nightfall.

HE started down the rocks. More rocks rose up ahead and he climbed them. Suddenly he stopped, listening. Far off, he could hear a sound, the sound of water. Was he approaching a pool of some kind? He went on again, trying to locate the sound. He scrambled down rocks and up rocks, and all around him there was silence, except for the splashing of distant water. Maybe a waterfall, water in motion. A stream. If he found the stream he might find the natives.

The rocks ended and the stream bed began again, but this time it was wet, the bottom muddy and overgrown with moss. He was on the right track; not too long ago this stream had flowed, probably during the rainy season. He went up on the side of the stream, pushing through the ferns and vines. A golden snake slid expertly out of his path. Something glinted ahead, something sparkling through the ferns. Water. A pool. He hurried, pushing the vines aside and stepping out, leaving them behind.

He was standing on the edge of a pool, a deep pool sunk in a hollow of grey rocks, surrounded by ferns and vines. The water was clear and bright, and in motion, flowing in a waterfall at the far end. It was beautiful, and he stood watching, marveling at it, the undisturbed quality of it. Un-

touched, it was. Just as it had always been, probably. As long as the asteroid existed. Was he the first to see it? Perhaps. It was so hidden, so concealed by the ferns. It gave him a strange feeling, a feeling almost of ownership. He stepped down a little toward the water.

And it was then he noticed her.

The girl was sitting on the far edge of the pool, staring down into the water, resting her head on one drawn-up knee. She had been bathing; he could see that at once. Her coppery body was still wet and glistening with moisture, sparkling in the sun. She had not seen him. He stopped, holding his breath, watching her.

She was lovely, very lovely, with long dark hair that wound around her shoulders and arms. Her body was slim, very slender, with a supple grace to it that made him stare, accustomed as he was to various forms of anatomy. How silent she was! Silent and unmoving, staring down at the water. Time passed, strange, unchanging time, as he watched the girl. Time might even have ceased, with the girl sitting on the rock staring into the water, and the rows of great ferns behind her, as rigid as if they had been painted there.

All at once the girl looked up. Harris shifted, suddenly conscious of himself as an intruder. He stepped back. "I'm sorry," he murmured. "I'm from the Garrison. I didn't mean to come poking around."

She nodded without speaking.

"You don't mind?" Harris asked presently.

"No."

So she spoke Terran! He moved a little toward her, around the side of the pool. "I hope you don't mind my bothering you. I won't be on the asteroid very long. This is my first day here. I just arrived from Terra."

She smiled faintly.

"I'm a doctor. Henry Harris." He looked down at her, at the slim coppery body, gleaming in the sunlight, a faint sheen of moisture on her arms and thighs. "You might be interested in why I'm here." He paused. "Maybe you can even help me."

She looked up a little. "Oh?"

"Would you like to help me?"

She smiled. "Yes. Of course."

"That's good. Mind if I sit down?" He looked around and found himself a flat rock. He sat down slowly, facing her. "Cigarette?"

"No."

"Well, I'll have one." He lit up, taking a deep breath. "You see, we have a problem at the Garrison. Something has been happening to some of the men, and it seems to be spreading. We have to find out what causes it or we won't be able to run the Garrison."

HE waited for a moment. She nodded slightly. How silent she was! Silent and unmoving. Like the ferns.

"Well, I've been able to find out

a few things from them, and one very interesting fact stands out. They keep saying that something called—called The Pipers are responsible for their condition. They say the Pipers taught them—" He stopped. A strange look had flitted across her dark, small face. "Do you know the Pipers?"

She nodded.

Acute satisfaction flooded over Harris. "You do? I was sure the natives would know." He stood up again. "I was sure they would, if the Pipers really existed. Then they do exist, do they?"

"They exist."

Harris frowned. "And they're here, in the woods?"

"Yes."

"I see." He ground his cigarette out impatiently. "You don't suppose there's any chance you could take me to them, do you?"

"Take you?"

"Yes. I have this problem and I have to solve it. You see, the Base Commander on Terra has assigned this to me, this business about the Pipers. It has to be solved. And I'm the one assigned to the job. So it's important to me to find them. Do you see? Do you understand?"

She nodded.

"Well, will you take me to them?"

The girl was silent. For a long time she sat, staring down into the water, resting her head against her knee. Harris began to become impatient. He fidgeted back and forth, resting first on one leg and

then on the other.

"Well, will you?" he said again. "It's important to the whole Garrison. What do you say?" He felt around in his pockets. "Maybe I could give you something. What do I have . . ." He brought out his lighter. "I could give you my lighter."

The girl stood up, rising slowly, gracefully, without motion or effort. Harris' mouth fell open. How supple she was, gliding to her feet in a single motion! He blinked. Without effort she had stood, seemingly without *change*. All at once she was standing instead of sitting, standing and looking calmly at him, her small face expressionless.

"Will you?" he said.

"Yes. Come along." She turned away, moving toward the row of ferns.

Harris followed quickly, stumbling across the rocks. "Fine," he said. "Thanks a lot. I'm very interested to meet these Pipers. Where are you taking me, to your village? How much time do we have before nightfall?"

The girl did not answer. She had entered the ferns already, and Harris quickened his pace to keep from losing her. How silently she glided!

"Wait," he called. "Wait for me."

The girl paused, waiting for him, slim and lovely, looking silently back.

He entered the ferns, hurrying after her.

"WELL I'll be damned!" Commander Cox said. "It sure didn't take you long." He leaped down the steps two at a time. "Let me give you a hand."

Harris grinned, lugging his heavy suitcases. He set them down and breathed a sigh of relief. "It isn't worth it," he said. "I'm going to give up taking so much."

"Come on inside. Soldier, give him a hand." A Patrolman hurried over and took one of the suitcases. The three men went inside and down the corridor to Harris' quarters. Harris unlocked the door and the Patrolman deposited his suitcase inside.

"Thanks," Harris said. He set the other down beside it. "It's good to be back, even for a little while."

"A little while?"

"I just came back to settle my affairs. I have to return to Y-3 tomorrow morning."

"Then you didn't solve the problem?"

"I solved it, but I haven't *cured* it. I'm going back and get to work right away. There's a lot to be done."

"But you found out what it is?"

"Yes. It was just what the men said. The Pipers."

"The Pipers do exist?"

"Yes." Harris nodded. "They do exist." He removed his coat and put it over the back of the chair. Then he went to the window and let it down. Warm spring air rushed into the room. He settled himself

on the bed, leaning back.

"The Pipers exist, all right—in the minds of the Garrison crew! To the crew, the Pipers are real. The crew created them. It's a mass hypnosis, a group projection, and all the men there have it, to some degree."

"How did it start?"

"Those men on Y-3 were sent there because they were skilled, highly-trained men with exceptional ability. All their lives they've been schooled by complex modern society, fast tempo and high integration between people. Constant pressure toward some goal, some job to be done.

"Those men are put down suddenly on an asteroid where there are natives living the most primitive of existence, completely vegetable lives. No concept of goal, no concept of purpose, and hence no ability to plan. The natives live the way the animals live, from day to day, sleeping, picking food from the trees. A kind of Garden-of-Eden existence, without struggle or conflict."

"So? But—"

"Each of the Garrison crew sees the natives and *unconsciously* thinks of his own early life, when he was a child, when *he* had no worries, no responsibilities, before he joined modern society. A baby lying in the sun.

"But he can't admit this to himself! He can't admit that he might *want* to live like the natives, to lie and sleep all day. So he invents **The Pipers**, the idea of a mysterious

group living in the woods who trap him, lead him into their kind of life. Then he can blame *them*, not himself. They 'teach' him to become a part of the woods."

"What are you going to do? Have the woods burned?"

"No." Harris shook his head. "That's not the answer; the woods are harmless. The answer is psycho-therapy for the men. That's why I'm going right back, so I can begin work. They've got to be made to see that the Pipers are inside them, their own unconscious voices calling to them to give up their responsibilities. They've got to be made to realize that there are no Pipers, at least, not outside themselves. The woods are harmless and the natives have nothing to teach anyone. They're primitive savages, without even a written language. We're seeing a psychological projection by a whole Garrison of men who want to lay down their work and take it easy for awhile."

The room was silent.

"I see," Cox said presently. "Well, it makes sense." He got to his feet. "I hope you can do something with the men when you get back."

"I hope so, too," Harris agreed. "And I think I can. After all, it's just a question of increasing their self-awareness. When they have that the Pipers will vanish."

Cox nodded. "Well, you go ahead with your unpacking, Doc. I'll see you at dinner. And maybe

before you leave, tomorrow."
"Fine."

HARRIS opened the door and the Commander went out into the hall. Harris closed the door after him and then went back across the room. He looked out the window for a moment, his hands in his pockets.

It was becoming evening, the air was turning cool. The sun was just setting as he watched, disappearing behind the buildings of the city surrounding the hospital. He watched it go down.

Then he went over to his two suitcases. He was tired, very tired from his trip. A great weariness was beginning to descend over him. There were so many things to do, so terribly many. How could he hope to do them all? Back to the asteroid. And then what?

He yawned, his eyes closing. How

sleepy he was! He looked over at the bed. Then he sat down on the edge of it and took his shoes off. So much to do, the next day.

He put his shoes in the corner of the room. Then he bent over, unsnapping one of the suitcases. He opened the suitcase. From it he took a bulging gunnysack. Carefully, he emptied the contents of the sack out on the floor. Dirt, rich soft dirt. Dirt he had collected during his last hours there, dirt he had carefully gathered up.

When the dirt was spread out on the floor he sat down in the middle of it. He stretched himself out, leaning back. When he was fully comfortable he folded his hands across his chest and closed his eyes. So much work to do—But later on, of course. Tomorrow. How warm the dirt was

He was sound asleep in a moment.

FEATURED NEXT ISSUE:—

THE ENCHANTED CRUSADE

By

GEOFF ST. REYNARD

A new novel by one of IMAGINATION'S most popular authors, Geoff St. Reynard is one of the most versatile writers in the field; his **BEWARE, THE USURPERS!** has been acclaimed a science-fantasy classic; his **ARMAGEDDON, 1971** has already been hailed one of science fiction's "great novels of a decade"; now Geoff St. Reynard turns his talents to the field of fantasy, and we predict you will remember his **THE ENCHANTED CRUSADE** for many years to come. We suggest that you reserve your copy at your favorite newsdealer right now—or better yet, turn to page 162 and subscribe—you'll receive your copy ahead of newsstand publication!

APRIL ISSUE OF IMAGINATION ON SALE FEBRUARY 3rd



ELEGY

by Charles Beaumont

It was an impossible situation: an asteroid in space where no asteroid should have been—with a city that could only have existed back on Earth!

“**W**OULD you mind repeating that?”

“I said, sir, that Mr. Friden said, sir, that he sees a city.”

“A city?”

“Yes sir.”

Captain Webber rubbed the back of his hand along his cheek.

“You realize, of course, that that is impossible?”

“Yes sir.”

“Send Mr. Friden in to see me, at once.”

The young man saluted and rushed out of the room. He returned with a somewhat older man who wore spectacles and frowned.

“Now then,” said Captain Webber, “what’s all this Lieutenant Peterson tells me about a city? Are you enjoying a private little joke, Friden?”

Mr. Friden shook his head emphatically. “No sir.”

“Then perhaps you’d like to explain.”

“Well, sir, you see, I was getting bored and just for something to do, I thought I’d look through the screen—not that I dreamed of seeing any-

thing. The instruments weren’t adjusted, either; but there was something funny, something I couldn’t make out exactly.”

“Go on,” said Captain Webber, patiently.

“So I fixed up the instruments and took another look, and there it was, sir, plain as could be!”

“There *what* was?”

“The city, sir. Oh, I couldn’t tell much about it, but there were houses, all right; a lot of them.”

“Houses, you say?”

“Yes sir, on an asteroid.”

Captain Webber looked for a long moment at Mr. Friden and began to pace nervously.

“I take it you know what this might mean?”

“Yes sir, I do. That’s why I wanted Lieutenant Peterson to tell you about it.”

“I believe, Friden, that before we do any more talking I’ll see this city for myself.”

CAPTAIN Webber, Lieutenant Peterson and Mr. Friden walked from the room down a long cor-

ridor and into a smaller room. Captain Webber put his eye to a circular glass and tapped his foot.

He stepped back and rubbed his cheek again.

"Well, you were right. That *is* a city—or else we've all gone crazy. Do you think that we have?"

"I don't know, sir. It's not impossible."

"Lieutenant, go ask Mr. Milton if he can land us on an asteroid. Give him all the details and be back in ten minutes." Captain Webber sighed. "Whatever it is," he said, "it will be a relief. Although I never made a special announcement, I suppose you knew that we were lost."

"Oh yes, sir."

"And that we ran almost entirely out of fuel several months ago, in fact shortly after we left?"

"We knew that."

The men were silent.

"Sir, Mr. Milton says he thinks he can land us but he can't promise exactly where."

"Tell Mr. Milton that's good enough."

Captain Webber waited for the young man to leave, then looked again into the glass.

"What do you make of it, sir?"

"Not much, Friden, not much. It's a city and that's an asteroid; but how the devil they got there is beyond me. I still haven't left the idea that we're crazy, you know."

Mr. Friden looked.

"We're positioning ^{to} land. Strange —"

"What is it?"

"I can make things out a bit more clearly now, sir. Those are earth houses."

Captain Webber looked. He blinked.

"Now, *that*" he said, "*is* impossible. Look here, we've been floating about in space for—how long is it?"

"Three months, sir."

"Exactly. For three months we've been bobbling aimlessly, millions of miles from earth. No hope, no hope whatever. And now we're landing in a city just like the one we first left, or almost like it. Friden, I ask you, does that make any sense at all?"

"No, sir."

"And does it seem logical that there should be an asteroid where no asteroid should be?"

"It does not."

They stared at the glass, by turns.

"Do you see that, Friden?"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

"A lake. A lake and a house by it and trees . . . tell me, how many of us are left?"

Mr. Friden held up his right hand and began unbending fingers.

"Yourself, sir, and myself; Lieutenant Peterson, Mr. Chitterwick, Mr. Goebelin, Mr. Milton and . . ."

"Great scott, out of thirty men?"

"You know how it was, sir. That business with the Martians and then, our own difficulties—"

"Yes. Our own difficulties. Isn't it ironic, somehow, Friden? We band together and fly away from war and, no sooner are we off the earth but

we begin other wars . . . I've often felt that if Appleton hadn't been so aggressive with that gun we would never have been kicked off Mars. And why did we have to laugh at them? Oh, I'm afraid I haven't been a very successful captain."

"You're in a mood, sir."

"Am I? I suppose I am. Look! There's a farm, an actual farm!"

"Not really!"

"Why, I haven't seen one for twenty years."

The door flew open and Lieutenant Peterson came in, panting. "Mr. Milton checked off every instruction, sir, and we're going down now."

"He's sure there's enough fuel left for the brake?"

"He thinks so, sir."

"Lieutenant Peterson."

"Yes sir?"

"Come look into this glass, will you."

The young man looked.

"What do you see?"

"A lot of strange creatures, sir. Are they dangerous? Should we prepare our weapons?"

"How old are you, Lieutenant?"

"Nineteen, Captain Webber."

"You have just seen a herd of cows, for the most part —" Captain Webber squinted and twirled knobs — "Holsteins."

"Holsteins, sir?"

"You may go. Oh, you might tell the others to prepare for a crash landing. Straps and all that."

The young man smiled faintly and left.

"I'm a little frightened, Friden; I think I'll go to my cabin. Take charge and have them wait for my orders."

Captain Webber saluted tiredly and walked back down the long corridor. He paused as the machines suddenly roared more life, rubbed his cheek and went into the small room.

"Cows," said Captain Webber bracing himself.

THE fiery leg fell into the cool air, heating it, causing it to smoke; it burnt into the green grass and licked a craterous hole. There were fireflashes and firebrands, hisses and explosions and the weary groaning sound of a great beast suddenly roused from sleep.

The rocket landed. It grumbled and muttered for a while on its finny tripod, then was silent; soon the heat vanished also.

"Are you all right, sir?"

"Yes. The rest?"

"All but Mr. Chitterwick. He broke his glasses and says he can't see."

Captain Webber swung himself erect and tested his limbs. "Well then, Lieutenant, has the atmosphere been checked?"

"The air is pure and fit to breathe, sir."

"Instruct the others to drop the ladder."

"Yes sir."

A door in the side of the rocket opened laboriously and men began

climbing out: "Look!" said Mr. Milton, pointing. "There are trees and grass and — over there, little bridges going over the water."

He pointed to a row of small white houses with green gardens and stony paths.

Beyond the trees was a brick lodge, extended over a rivulet which foamed and bubbled. Fishing poles protruded from the lodge window.

"And there, to the right!"

A steel building thirty stories high with a pink cloud near the top. And, separated by a hedge, a brown tent with a barbeque pit before it, smoke rising in a rigid ribbon from the chimney.

Mr. Chitterwick 'blinked and squinted his eyes. "What do you see?"

Distant and near, houses of stone and brick and wood, painted all colors, small, large; and further, golden fields of wheat, each blown by a different breeze in a different direction.

"I don't believe it," said Captain Webber. "It's a *park*—millions of miles away from where a park could possibly be."

"Strange but familiar," said Lieutenant Peterson, picking up a rock.

Captain Webber looked in all directions. "We were lost. Then we see a city where no city should be, on an asteroid not shown on any chart, and we manage to land. And now we're in the middle of a place that belongs in history-records. We may be crazy; we may all be wander-

ing around in space and dreaming."

The little man with the thin hair who had just stepped briskly from a treeclump said, "Well, well," and the men jumped.

The little man smiled. "Aren't you a trifle late or early or something?"

Captain Webber turned and his mouth dropped open.

"I hadn't been expecting you, gentlemen, to be perfectly honest," the little man clucked, then: "Oh dear, see what you've done to Mr. Bellefont's park. I do hope you haven't hurt him—no, I see that he is all right."

Captain Webber followed the direction of the man's eyes and perceived an old man with red hair seated at the base of a tree, apparently reading a book.

"We are from Earth," said Captain Webber.

"Yes, yes."

"Let me explain: my name is Webber, these are my men."

"Of course," said the little man.

Mr. Chitterwick came closer, blinking. "Who is this that knows our language?" he asked.

"Who — Greypoole, Mr. Greypoole. Didn't *they* tell you?"

"Then you are *also* from Earth?"

"Heavens yes! But now, let us go where we can chat more comfortably." Mr. Greypoole struck out down a small path past scorched trees and underbrush. "You know, Captain, right after the last consignment something happened to my cal-

endar. Now, I'm competent at my job, but I'm no technician, no indeed: besides, no doubt you or one of your men can set the doodad right, eh? Here we are."

They walked onto a wooden porch and through a door with a wire screen; Lieutenant Peterson first, then Captain Webber, Mr. Friden and the rest of the crew. Mr. Greypoole followed.

"You must forgive me — it's been a while. Take chairs, there, there. Now, what news of — home, shall I say?" The little man stared.

Captain Webber shifted uncomfortably. He glanced around the room at the lace curtains, the needle-point tapestries and the lavender wallpaper.

"Mr. Greypoole, I'd like to ask some questions."

"Certainly, certainly. But first, this being an occasion —" the little man stared at each man carefully, then shook his head "—ah, do you all like wine? Good wine?"

He ducked through a small door.

Captain Webber exhaled and rose.

"Now, don't start talking all at once," he whispered. "Anyone have any ideas? No? Then quick, scout around — Friden, you stay here; you others, see what you can find. I'm not sure I like the looks of this."

The men left the room.

MR. Chitterwick made his way along a hedgerow, feeling cautiously and maintaining a delicate balance. When he came to a door-

way he stopped, squinted and entered.

The room was dark and quiet and odorous. Mr. Chitterwick groped a few steps, put out his hand and encountered what seemed to be raw flesh; he swiftly withdrew his hand. "Excuse," he said, then, "Oh!" as his face came against a slab of moist red meat. "Oh my!"

Mr. Chitterwick began to tremble and he blinked furiously, reaching out and finding flesh, cold and hard, unidentifiable.

When he stepped upon the toe of a large man with a walrus mustache, he wheeled, located the sunlight and ran from the butcher shop

* * *

The door of the temple opened with difficulty, which caused Mr. Milton to breathe unnaturally. Then, once inside, he gasped.

Row upon row of people, their fingers outstretched, lips open but immobile and silent, their bodies prostrate on the floor. And upon a strange black altar, a tiny woman with silver hair and a long thyrsus in her right hand.

Nothing stirred but the mosaic squares in the walls. The colors danced here; otherwise, everything was frozen, everything was solid.

Even the air hung suspended, stationary.

Mr. Milton left the temple

* * *

There was a table and a woman on the table and people all around

the woman on the table. Mr. Goebelin did not go a great distance from the doorway: he rubbed his eyes and stared.

It was an operating room. There were all the instruments, some old, most old, and the masked men and women with shining scissors and glistening saws in their hands. And up above, the students' aperture: filled seats, filled aisles.

Mr. Goebelin put his other hand about the doorknob.

A large man stood over the recumbent figure, his lusterless eyes regarding the crimson-puce incision, but he did not move. The nurses did not move, or the students. No one moved, especially the smiling middle-aged woman on the table.

Mr. Goebelin moved

* * *

"Hello!" said Lieutenant Peterson, after he had searched through eight long aisles of books. "Hello!"

He pointed his gun menacingly.

There were many books with many titles and they all had a fine grey dust about them. Lieutenant Peterson paused to examine a bulky volume, when he happened to look above him.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

The mottled, angular man perched atop the ladder did not respond. He clutched a book and looked at the book and not at Lieutenant Peterson.

"Come down — I want to talk with you!"

The man on the ladder did nothing

unusual: he remained precisely as he had been.

Lieutenant Peterson climbed up the ladder, scowling; he reached the man and jabbed with a finger.

Lieutenant Peterson looked into the eyes of the reading man and descended hastily and did not say goodbye

Mr. Greypoole reentered the living room with a tray of glasses. "This is apricot wine," he announced, distributing the glasses, "But — where are the others? Out for a walk? Ah well, they can drink theirs later. Incidentally, Captain, how many Guests did you bring? Last time it was only twelve. Not an extraordinary shipment, either: they all preferred the ordinary things. All but Mrs. Dominguez — dear me, she was worth the carload herself. Wanted a zoo, can you imagine — a regular zoo, with her put right in the bird-house. Oh, they had a time putting that one up!"

Mr. Greypoole chuckled and sipped at his drink.

"It's people like Mrs. Dominguez who put the — the life? — into Happy Glades. Or do you find that disrespectful?"

Captain Webber shook his head and tossed down his drink.

Mr. Greypoole leaned back in his chair and crossed a leg. "Ah," he continued, "you have no idea how good this is. Once in a while it does get lonely for me here — no man is an island, or how does it go? Why,

I can remember when Mr. Waldmeyer first told me of this idea. 'A grave responsibility,' he said, 'a *grave* responsibility.' Mr. Waldmeyer has a keen sense of humor, needless to say."

Captain Webber looked out the window. A small child on roller skates stood still on the sidewalk. Mr. Greypoole laughed.

"Finished your wine? Good. Explanations are in order, though first perhaps you'd care to join me in a brief turn about the premises?"

"Fine. Friden, you stay here and wait for the men." Captain Webber winked a number of times and frowned briefly, then he and Mr. Greypoole walked out onto the porch and down the steps.

Mr. Friden drummed his fingers upon the arm of a chair, surveyed his empty glass and hiccupped softly.

"I DO wish you'd landed your ship elsewhere, Captain. Mr. Bellefont was quite particular and, as you can see, his park is hopelessly disfigured."

"We were given no choice, I'm afraid. The fuel was running out."

"Indeed? Well then, that explains everything. A beautiful day, don't you find, sir? Fortunately, with the exception of Professor Carling, all the Guests preferred good weather. Plenty of sunshine, they said, or crisp evening. It helps."

They walked toward a house of colored rocks.

"Miss Daphne Trilling's," said Mr. Greypoole, gesturing. "They threw it up in a day, though it's solid enough."

When they had passed an elderly woman on a bicycle, Captain Webber stopped walking. •

"Mr. Greypoole, we've *got* to have a talk."

Mr. Greypoole shrugged and pointed and they went into an office building which was crowded with motionless men, women and children.

"Since I'm so mixed up myself," the captain said, "maybe I'd better ask—just who do you think *we* are?"

"I'd thought you to be the men from the Glades of course."

"I don't have the slightest idea what you're talking about. We're from the planet Earth. They were going to have another war, the 'Last War' they said, and we escaped in that rocket and started off for Mars. But something went wrong — fellow named Appleton pulled a gun, others just didn't like the Martians — we needn't go into it; they wouldn't have us so Mars didn't work out. Something else went wrong then, soon we were lost with only a little store of fuel and supplies. Then Mr. Friden noticed this city or whatever it is and we had enough fuel to land so we landed."

Mr. Greypoole nodded his head slowly, somehow, sadder than before.

"I see . . . You say there was a war on Earth?"

"They were going to set off X-Bomb; when they do, everything will go to pieces. Or everything has already."

"What dreadful news! May I inquire, Captain, when you have learned where you are — what do you intend to do?"

"Why, live here, of course!"

"No, no — try to understand. You could not conceivably fit in here with us."

Captain Webber glanced at the motionless people. "Why not?" Then he shouted, "What is this place? *Where am I?*"

Mr. Greypoole smiled.

"Captain, you are in a cemetery."

"GOOD work, Peterson!"

"Thanks, sir. When we all got back and Friden didn't know where you'd gone, well, we got worried. Then we heard you shouting."

"Hold his arms — there. You heard this, Friden?"

Mr. Friden was trembling slightly. He brushed past a man with a van Dyke beard and sat down on a leather stool. "Yes sir, I did. That is, I think I did. What shall we do with him?"

"I don't know, yet. Take him away, Lieutenant, for now. I want to think a bit. We'll talk to Mr. Greypoole later on."

Lieutenant Peterson pulled the smiling little man out into the street and pointed a gun at him.

Mr. Chitterwick blinked into the face of a small child.

"Man's insane, I guess," said Mr. Milton, pacing.

"Yes, but what about all *this*?" Mr. Goebelin looked horrified at the stationary people.

"I think I can tell you," Mr. Friden said. "Take a look, Captain."

The men crowded about a pamphlet which Mr. Friden had placed on the stool.

Toward the top of the pamphlet and in the center of the first page was a photograph, untinted and solemn; it depicted a white cherub delicately poised on a granite slab. Beneath the photograph, were the words: HAPPY GLADES.

Captain Webber turned the pages and mumbled, glancing over his shoulder every once in a while.

"What is it, sir?" asked Mr. Chitterwick of a frozen man in a blue suit with copper buttons.

"It's one of those old level cemeteries!" cried Mr. Milton. "I remember seeing pictures like it, sir."

Captain Webber read aloud from the pamphlet.

"For fifty years," he began, "an outstanding cultural and spiritual asset to this community, HAPPY GLADES is proud to announce yet another innovation in its program of post-benefits. NOW YOU CAN ENJOY THE AFTER-LIFE IN SURROUNDINGS WHICH SUGGEST THE HERE-AND-NOW. Never before in history has scientific advancement allowed such a plan."

Captain Webber turned the page.

"For those who prefer that their

late departed have really *permanent, eternal* happiness, for those who are dismayed by the fragility of all things mortal, we of HAPPY GLADES are proud to offer:

1. The permanent duplication of physical conditions identical to those enjoyed by the departed on Earth. Park, playground, lodge, office building, hotel or house, etc., may be secured at varying prices. All workmanship and materials specially attuned to conditions on ASTEROID K7 and guaranteed for PERMANENCE.
2. PERMANENT conditioning of late beloved so that, in the midst of surroundings he favored, a genuine Eternity may be assured.
3. Full details on HAPPY GLADES' newest property, Asteroid K7, may be found on page 4."

The captain tossed the pamphlet to the floor and lit a cigarette. "Did anyone happen to notice the date?"

Mr. Milton said, "It doesn't make any sense! There haven't been cemeteries for ages. And even if this were true, why should anyone want to go all the way through space to a little asteroid? They might just as well have built these things on Earth."

"Who would want all this when they're dead, anyway?"

"You mean all these people are dead?"

For a few moments there was com-

plete and utter silence in the lobby of the building.

"**A**RE those things true, that we read in your booklet?" asked Captain Webber after Lieutenant Peterson had brought in the prisoner.

"Every word," said the little man bowing slightly, "is monumentally correct."

"Then we want you to begin explaining."

Mr. Greypoole tushed and proceeded to straighten the coat of a middle-aged man with a cigar.

Mr. Goebelin shuddered.

"No, no," laughed Mr. Greypoole, "*these* are only imitations. Mr. Conklin upstairs was head of a large firm; absolutely in love with his work, you know — that kind of thing. So we had to duplicate not only the office, but the building and even replicas of all the people in the building. Mr. Conklin himself is in an easy chair on the twentieth story."

"And?"

"Well, gentlemen, as you know, Happy Glades is the outstanding mortuary on Earth. And, to put it briefly, with the constant explorations of planets and moons and what-not, our Mr. Waldmeyer hit upon this scheme: Seeking to extend the ideal hereafter to our Guests, we bought out this little asteroid. With the vast volume and the tremendous turnover, as it were, we got our staff of scientists together and they offered this plan — to duplicate the

exact surroundings which the Guest most enjoyed in Life, assure him privacy, permanence (a *very* big point, as you can see), and all the small things not possible on Earth."

"Why here, why cart off a million miles or more when the same thing could have been done on Earth?"

"My communication system went bad, I fear, so I haven't heard from the offices in some while — but, I am to understand there is a war beginning? *That* is the idea, Captain; one could never really be sure of one's self down there, what with all the new bombs and things being discovered."

"Hmm," said Captain Webber.

"Then too, Mr. Waldmeyer worried about those new societies with their dreadful ideas about cremation—you can see what that sort of thing could do to the undertaking business? His plan caught on, however, and soon we were having to turn away Guests."

"And where do you fit in, Mr. Greypoole?"

The little man seemed to blush; he lowered his eyes. "I was head caretaker, you see. But I wasn't well — gastric complaints, liver, heart palpitations, this and that; so, I decided to allow them to *change* me. They turned all manner of machines on my body and pumped me full of fluids and by the time I got here, why, I was almost, you might say, a machine myself! Fortunately, though, they left a good deal of Greypoole. All I know is that when-

ever the film is punctured, I wake and become a machine, do my prescribed duties in a complex way and—"

"The film?"

"The covering that seals in the conditioning. Nothing can get out, nothing get in — except things like rockets. Then, it's self-sealing, needless to say. But to get on, Captain. With all the technical advancements, it soon got to where there was no real work to be done here; they threw up the film and coated us with their preservative or, as they put it, Eternifier, and — well, with the exception of my calendar and the communications system, everything's worked perfectly, including myself."

NO one said anything for a while. Then Captain Webber said, with great slowness, "You're lying. **This is all a crazy, hideous plot.**" The little man chuckled at the word plot.

"In the first place, no cemetery or form of cemetery has existed on Earth for — how long, Friden?"

Mr. Friden stared at his fingers. "Years and years."

"Exactly. There are communal furnaces now."

Mr. Greypoole winced.

"And furthermore," continued the captain, "this whole concept is ridiculous."

Mr. Chitterwick threw down the pamphlet and began to tremble. "We should have stayed home," he

remarked to a young woman who did not answer.

"Mr. Greypoole," Webber said, "I think that you know more than you're saying. You didn't seem very surprised when you learned we weren't the men you expected; you don't seem very surprised now that I tell you that your 'Happy Glades' and all the people connected with it have been dead for ages. So, why the display of interest in our explanations, why—"

The faint murmur, "A good machine checks and double checks," could be heard from Mr. Greypoole, who otherwise said nothing.

"I speak for my men: we're confused, terribly confused. But whatever this is, we're stuck, can't you see? All we want is a place to begin again—" Captain Webber paused, looked at the others and went on in a softer tone. "We're tired men, Mr. Greypoole; we're poorly equipped, but we do have weapons and if this is some hypnotic kind of trap . . ."

The little man waved his hand, offensively.

"There are lakes and farms and all we need to make a new start—more than we'd hoped for, much more."

"What *had* you hoped for, Captain?"

"Something. Nothing. Just escape—"

"But I see no women — how could you begin again, as you suggest?"

"Women? Too weak; they would

not have lasted. We brought along eggs and machines — enough for our needs."

Mr. Greypoole clucked his tongue. "Mr. Waldmeyer certainly did look ahead," he muttered, "he certainly *did*."

"Will we be honest now? Will you help us?"

"Yes, Captain, I will help you. Let us go back to your rocket." Mr. Greypoole smiled. "Things will be better there."

Captain Webber signaled. They left the building and walked by the foot of a white mountain.

They passed a garden with little spotted trees and flowers, a brown desert of shifting sands and a striped tent; they walked by strawberry fields and airplane hangars and coal mines; tiny yellow cottages, cramped apartments, fluted houses and Tudor houses and houses without description

Past rock pools and a great zoo full of animals that stared out of vacant eyes; and everywhere, the seasons changing gently: crisp autumn, cottony summer, windy spring and winters cool and white . . .

The six men in uniforms followed the little man with the thin hair. They did not speak as they walked, but looked around, stared, craned, wondered . . .

And the old, young, middle-aged, white, brown, yellow people who did not move wondered back at the men with their eyes . . .

"You see, Captain, the success of Mr. Waldmeyer's plan?"

Captain Webber rubbed his cheek.

"I don't understand," he said.

"But you do see, all of you, the perfection here, the quality of Eternal Happiness which the circular speaks of?"

"Yes we see that."

"Here we have happiness and brotherhood, here there have never been wars or hatreds or prejudices. And now you who were many and left Earth to escape war and hatred, who were many by your own word and are now only six, you want to begin life *here*?"

Cross-breezes ruffled the men's hair.

"To *begin*, when from the moment of your departure you had wars of your own, and killed, and hurled mocking prejudice against a race of people not like you, a race who rejected and cast you out into space again! From your own account! No gentlemen, I am truly sorry. It may be that I misjudged those of you who are left, or rather, that Happy Glades misjudged you. You may mean well, after all — and, of course, the location of this asteroid was so planned by the Board as to be uncharted forever. But — oh, I am sorry." Mr. Greypoole sighed.

"What does he mean by that?" asked Mr. Friden and Lieutenant Peterson.

Captain Webber was gazing at a herd of cows in the distance.

"What do you mean, you're 'sor-

ry'?" demanded Mr. Friden.

"Well . . ."

"Captain Webber!" cried Mr. Chitterwick, blinking.

"Yes, yes?"

"I feel queer."

Mr. Goebelin clutched at his stomach.

"So do I!"

"And me!"

Captain Webber looked back at the fields, then at Mr. Greypoole. His mouth twitched in sudden pain.

"We feel awful, Captain!"

"I'm sorry, gentlemen. Follow me to your ship, quickly." Mr. Greypoole motioned curiously with his hands and began to step briskly.

They circled a small pond where a motionless boy strained toe-high on an extended board. And the day once again turned to night as they hurried past a shadowed cathedral.

When they were in sight of the scorched trees, Mr. Milton doubled up and screamed.

"Captain!"

Mr. Goebelin struck his forehead. "I told you, I told you we shouldn't have drunk that wine! Didn't I tell you?"

"It was the wine — and we all drank it. *He* did it, *he* poisoned us!"

"Follow me!" cried Mr. Greypoole, making a hurried gesture and breaking into a run. "Faster!"

They stumbled hypnotically through the park, over the Mandarin-bridges to the rock.

"Tell them, Captain, tell them to climb the ladder."

"Go on up, men."

"But we're poisoned, sir!"

"*Hurry!* There's — an antidote in the ship."

The crew climbed into the ship.

"Captain," invited Mr. Graypoole.

Captain Webber ascended jerkily. When he reached the open lock, he turned. His eyes swept over the hills and fields and mountains, over the rivers and houses and still people. He coughed and pulled himself into the rocket.

Mr. Greypoole followed.

"You don't dislike this ship, do you — that is, the surroundings are not offensive?"

"No; we don't dislike the ship."

"I am glad of that—if *only* I had been allowed more latitude! But everything functions so well here; no real choice in the matter, actually. No more than the Sealing Film. And they *would* leave me with these human emotions! I see, of course, why the communications system doesn't work, why my calendar is out of commission. Kind of Mr. Waldmeyer to arrange for them to stop when his worst fears finally materialized. Are the men all seated? No, no, they mustn't writhe about the floor like that. Get them to their stations — no, to the stations they would most prefer. And hurry!"

Captain Webber ordered Mr. Chitwick to the galley, Mr. Goebelin to the engineering chair, Mr. Friden to the navigator's room . . .

"Sir, what's going to happen? *Where's the antidote?*"

Mr. Milton to the pilot's chair . . .

"The pain will last only another moment or so — it's unfortunately part of the Eternifier," said Mr. Greypoole. "There, all in order? Good, good. Now, Captain, I see understanding in your face; that pleases me more than I can say. My position is so difficult! But you can see, when a machine is geared to its job — which is to retain permanence on HAPPY GLADES — well, a machine is a machine. Where shall we put *you?*"

Captain Webber leaned on the arm of the little man and walked to the open lock.

"You *do* understand?" asked Mr. Greypoole.

Captain Webber's head nodded halfway down, then stopped; and his eyes froze forever upon the City.

"A pity . . ."

The little man with the thin hair walked about the cabins and rooms, straightening, dusting; he climbed down the ladder, shook his head and started down the path to the wooden house.

When he had washed all the empty glasses and replaced them, he sat down in the large leather chair and adjusted himself into the most comfortable position.

His eyes stared in waxen contentment at the homely interior, with its lavender wallpaper, needle-point tapestries and tidy arrangement.

He did not move.

The Dark Goddess

By

Richard S. Shaver

Deep within her caverns the great mer-woman longed for death to end her loneliness. But then came a voyager from space—a man—also lonely . . .

THE black-emerald water swirled and broke in many silver gleamings. From the misty center of the pool rose a vast but beautiful head. The long dripping hair was not hair, but had a rippling life of its own. The great lonely eyes and wide scarlet mouth were far more lovely than any human's. The gleaming green shoul-

ders and shapely long arms ended in graceful webbed fingers. The red tipped breasts were proud, naked mounts where beauty lived forever. The pillaring waist—the strong-arched hips that did not divide into legs but into two great serpentine drivers—ended in the wide tail fins of a fish.

The dark sea-scented lapping





green water was circled by tiers of marble seats, where many human people sat, their eyes upon the throne-seat into which the tremendous female figure vaulted in one powerful thrust from the water, as a tall wave uncurls effortlessly upon a golden beach.

The people bowed their heads and waited for her words, and she sat for a long time looking on them sadly and somehow conveying that they had long disappointed her. When her voice came, a great bell of meaning in the sea-cavern, the humans began to weep, for they knew now in their hearts they had failed her.

"My people, when the first of you came here I welcomed you. I was glad, for I had been long alone. I never knew my own origin, my own race, and the wisdom that I learned here in these caverns I was glad to give to the young and ignorant voyagers that first came.

"An age ago, before any of you saw life, the work began. Today, this home of ours is the fruit of long labor, of generations of men. We do not like to give up our home, built to house our genius, to provide everlasting protection against the unstable elements."

Her people, of several shapes and sizes, sourcing from an amalgam of many human races of divergent strains from several near-forgotten planets, all sighed together, like a little wind of sadness. And something about that resignation of theirs seemed to anger the great green

mer-woman's eyes, but her voice did not reflect that anger. All about them, below and above and on and on around the ancient bedrock of the dark planet, tier on tier and level on level, their cavern city stretched, a myriad homes for a myriad individuals.

"Today we face a contingency long foreseen. One which we hoped time itself would change, through some new force changing the motions of those bodies which circle ahead of us in space. It was foretold that in time this planet in its free course through space would be attracted to one or the other of two great suns which it will pass—or encounter. It is most probable that our planet will find an orbit about one of those suns ahead.

"Today that fate is no longer a prediction from an astronomer peering into far space. It is a fact we face within short weeks, not in some far future time. Already the surface ice is melting, seas forming above. Already those who used to travel on the surface on their duties and observations have been affected by the powerful radiations of those suns. Those radiations when we are caught and held close will shorten the life span to a hundredth of what it is now. You must go, and go now. You must seek out a new home in the darkness of space where no sun shines to cut your lives short."

A low sob broke from the almost silent people; then another. For years they had known this would oc-

cur, but now there was no time left. It was hard to think of leaving their ancient home. A low and youthful voice asked, a clear ringing voice:

"And what of you, Alfreyra? How can you accompany us? There has been no ship built to hold the water you must have, no ship great enough to hold your weight or lift it. What will you do?"

Her laugh was somehow one of vast relief, of humor of some mysterious kind they could not fathom, of loneliness glad once more to be alone. "I remain. This is my home, and if my knowledge is not great enough to fight off the death the new sun brings then I will welcome death. It could be, dear people, that I am weary of life."

The people could not hear her inward thought — "and of other lives, too." — but perhaps they felt it in their hearts.

The gigantic mer-creature dove then, from her throne into the green-dark water, and left her people to their own devices. They saw her no more.

THE evacuation under way, the great ships lanced upward, one after another. One every three seconds, for a month of earth time. And deep in the water of her subterranean abode, it seemed to one great heart that with each blast of sound as another great ship lifted, some weight lifted from her heart.

The people of the Dark Goddess leaving their ancient home were very numerous, and very sad. But

few of them thought twice of their ancient benefactress who had welcomed their ancestors, taught them, started them abuilding in the rock their vast cavern homes. If she wished to remain and die, that was her affair. She was not human. She was only a bit of ancient history that had somehow remained alive.

All of the people of the dark planet of ice were included in that migration. Not one remained to face death with their ancient Goddess. The dark planet moved on into its new orbit, empty of life. Empty, that is, except for one dark lonely heart. The mer-creature was too vast of body for any ship to hold. Besides, she breathed water—and she did not want to go. That was very strange. Very strange indeed. Of all that myriad of departing voyagers, not one understood why their Dark Goddess did not wish to go along. Which perhaps explains the mystery.

* * *

An age passed. Or was it but a few years, a hundred or so? The mer-woman did not count the years. The once free planet now circled the angry red sun as a humble captive. On its now warm surface soil formed and plants grew. Trees and animals began to move about, grow larger. It was a new wild jungle planet, untouched by organized intelligence of any kind.

Deep down in the dim caverns, in her deepest lair, the mistress of an age of magic slept, and waked,

and slept again. And what she thought about, and what she waited for, and what she did with the endless time on her hands, were mysteries. Mysteries, at times, even to herself. But her heart was sometimes very light, and glad to be alone, and at other times, very sad, and very sure that mankind itself was not what she would wish it to be. In searching her heart, Alfreya knew she was very well rid of all that clutter in the caverns overhead.

FROM the outer darkness of space came a tiny shape, speeding on and on toward this sun and captive planet. It was going from nowhere to nowhere at a terrific rate.

There are many shapes adrift in space, bits of rock, celestial debris awash in the infinite oceans of ether. But this shape was not a rock. It was of metal, and within it was a man named Peter McCarthy.

He was a very hungry man, and a very thirsty man, and when the great red sun reached out and pulled his ship to itself, Pete in his fuel depleted craft gave silent thanks that at last the end had come.

This would be a quick clean death in the flames, and Pete turned his back on the sun and waited. But when he heard the air screaming about his hull, he turned back to the bow view panes again.

"Well, I'll be damned!" cried Peter McCarthy. For a huge green planet had pushed itself between

him and the sun, and he did not like that at all. "It's another of cruel Fate's devices to lengthen my torments!" said Peter, and wept salt tears of weakness.

But his hands responded automatically. They thrust to the controls in front of him and fired the long unused jets. A bit of fuel had collected in the bottom of his tanks, and the jets blasted out, the ship lifted, held itself upright on a pillar of sudden flame. Pete let it sink, swiftly but gently, so that it fell hissing into the rolling green seas without smashing to bits.

It sank down through the green waters like a stone, and McCarthy fell weakly across the controls, and did not move a finger to change her downward course. In truth, he hoped the ship would never come up again. He was sick and tired of fighting against death.

Hours passed, and he slept, dreaming vague little dreams of eating and drinking and flirting with the girls in the streets of Port Freedom. No light came through the single hemisphere of transparency in front of his nose, and he finally switched on the search-beam on the ship's nose.

"Stuck in the mud, I hope, jade that she is, and good for her, making me die like this," Pete muttered, hating even the cracked crazy sound of his own voice.

But the bowlight shafted ahead in brilliant clarity, piercing no ocean depths or ooze or mud-flats, but glancing over the racing ripples of

a flowing river. Above the river surface the rocks came down, so low Pete could hear them touch the hull, scrape, grind free, as their touch sent the craft deeper in the hurrying water.

"Holy old Harry," growled McCarthy, rubbing at his slackened features. "She fell right through the bottom of the sea into some subterranean flow . . ." He yawned, and stretched a little, and cursed again. "Sure, I couldn't expect her to do anything else, with my luck aboard her. There were trees and sunlight, and water . . . ah, water up there, somewhere. I saw them, falling in, I did. Do I land where I can get anything like water? Hell no! I crash right on down into this hole!" He laughed a weak bitter laugh. Then he leaned back and began to sing through cracked and bleeding lips:

*"There's a hole in the bottom
of the sea;*

*There's a rock in a hole in the
bottom of the sea;*

*There's a crab on a rock in the
hole in the bottom "*

And he began to snore, having fallen asleep.

SOME hours later, Peter McCarthy awoke, little refreshed because of the raging thirst within him. With terrific effort he got to his feet, noting that the ship was no longer moving.

The bow light was still burning, but it showed only a black wall of smooth rock ahead. He switched

it off, turning on the inside lights. He staggered and cursed his weakness, but he made it to the airlock. With feeble hands he tugged the little wheel around that pulled back the big bars on the lock door.

"I'll get this over with, somehow. I'll just jump into the damned black water and drink the damn river dry . . ."

The big outer lock door swung open, and he straightened, half expecting a rush of icy water about his feet. But instead a warm and slightly fragrant air drifted silently in, touched his tangled hair with idle and somehow playful fingers.

"Still teasing me, you dirty old tramp!" growled the lean McCarthy, to whom death had become a personal enemy, a figure he had both pursued and fled from across a vast and empty space. A nemesis he could not escape, and a fiend he could not quite catch.

He tugged loose a hand flash from the bracket by the lock, and staggered out upon the smooth rock floor against which the ship had come to rest. He snapped on the light, and then he stood gaping stupidly at the rock walls in disbelief.

There were carvings, deep cut reliefs of utter beauty, twining vine leaves, little figures half-human peeping from the leaves, lovely female bodies as the flowers, incredibly lovely female heads in clusters as the fruit.

"I've come to the Halls of Bacchus himself! Sure, I must be dead already. No wonder I can't manage

to die! But if that ain't the vine itself, I've never been drunk!" Pete was half delirious, half in the darkness of utter despair. But his Irish heart whispered to him, "Where there's the vine there's wine," and he tottered off weakly into the dark in search of it.

Somewhere afar off he heard a faint mysterious laugh, strangely feminine, strangely friendly. He stopped, for ahead of him was approaching a strange faint light. Closer it came, stalking toward him fearfully, and to anyone else it would have seemed like an animated clothing store dummy without the clothes. But the figure was feminine, and it bore on its shoulder a tall oval vase-like vessel.

Pete straightened, and awe swept over him. In a low voice he heard himself quoting—

*"Came toward me through the
dusk an angel-shape,
Bearing on her shoulder a vessel*

...

*And bid me taste of it.
'Twas the grape!"*

McCarthy's tongue twisted strangely in his mouth with a desirous life of its own. The glowing angel-shape bent, and held the vessel to his lips, and he drank long and deep. He wiped his mouth on the back of his hand, and looked into the angel's glowing eyes.

As he looked the shape changed, subtly, adapting itself to his approval like a dream might, and McCarthy whispered in an awed voice:

"Sure, lady, it is the grape right

enough! Now tell me, are you the same angel who gave drink to Omar? Or was she your sister, maybe?"

The glowing shape, growing second by second more sweetly curved to his eye, unsmilingly replaced the vessel on her shoulder. Her voice was a distant melody though her face was right before his eyes:

"I am but a messenger, dear welcome stranger. I bid you consider these ancient halls your home. When you are well and strong, there will be many things to talk of, for I have been long alone. Mine eyes are glad with the sight of you."

McCarthy touched the naked angel's shoulder, and was surprised to find it hard as steel. The glowing being did not seem surprised, and her arm went about his shoulders, supporting him easily. After a minute of this slow progress, she bent and picked McCarthy up in her arms as if he were a babe. McCarthy murmured, "Sure angel, be this Heaven or Hell I'm damned glad to get here."

THE voyager lay unconscious for many days. While he slept, dozens of the weird "angels" hovered over him and what they poured down his throat and what they injected into his veins he never knew. But when at last he awakened he felt like the man he had been twenty years before, young in heart and with a boundless happiness of well-being surging up in him like a great spring of Omar's wine.

So waking, he sprang to his feet as he had used to do in the morning, unable to wait to learn what new and curious thing the day would bear for him. He looked about him with eyes that could not believe, and he was a long time remembering how he had got here or where he was. And when he did, it was to wonder why he had been so sunk in despair and so ready to accept death.

One of the tall glowing shapes came and bowed low before him, and McCarthy saw for an instant she was not a living woman at all, nor any angel either!

"Why you're a robot kind of thing!" cried Pete, recoiling in sudden distrust, for there was something revolting to him about a metal machine masquerading as a human form.

The glowing woman-shape straightened proudly, and her long fiery eyes narrowed a little, and her voice like distant tinkling magic murmured softly, "Are you so very sure I am not alive, man from afar?"

McCarthy kept looking at her, and she changed before his very eyes, and at last his wits awoke, so that he said gallantly, "Sure and you're as beautiful a woman as ever I saw in my life! I'm owing you my life, and I'd be the last would want to hurt your feelings. Nobody could be sorrier for the mistake than I am."

Now whatever she was, he could no longer tell her from a living

woman of great beauty, for she had changed before his eyes from a metallic monstrosity of glowing terror to a softly curved beauty that would have graced the stage of any musical show, and her voice was far too good for any show that Pete had ever listened to. As she moved closer to him, her weirdly lovely voice whispered, "So my arms are hard as steel, man from space?" and put her arms around him, and they were soft and firm and fine arms to feel indeed.

Peter McCarthy, in sudden wonder, kissed the glowing weird lips of the lovely thing, and the taste was different but far more lovely than any woman's lips had ever been before.

"Now may God strike me, but I must be losing my wits," swore McCarthy, "but I had thought you were made of steel for sure!"

Somewhere afar there came a music of laughter; he could not exactly hear it but he felt it, as if the very walls were amused with him. It was a powerful laugh, with an undertinkling to it, like a distant bell beneath water, struck by a little stone so that it gave out both strong sounds and little sounds

A very beautiful laugh but very strange to hear.

With the sound of that laughter an awe came to McCarthy; he felt the touch of some terrific magic, and he gave up trying to understand what was happening to him.

"This is a strange place," he muttered, rubbing his chin. "A strange

place indeed. Could ye tell me, Miss Angel, what place this is and how I can expect to get along here and why you're so good to a poor wanderer like myself?"

The angel-shape — which second by second was getting to be more and more the shape of ultimate beauty to his eye, as if she was learning the way of it better and better right out of his mind; as if she was taking from his own thinking the colors and the shapes and form and spirit that would please him most—gave a laugh that was very like the strange great tinkling sound from nowhere. Her voice was like sparkling water falling on suspended crystals that rang musically, and she looked into his eyes out of her own fiery strange eyes of terrible beauty.

"This is the best of all possible places you could have come to, and your host is the best of all possible hosts and what more do you need to know today, Peter McCarthy?"

For an instant a shadow passed over the strange glowing eyes of the angel-shape, as if she remembered something she did not want to remember, and he asked:

"What is that shadow of trouble, if this is so good a place for me?"

She answered him quickly as the shadow passed from her eyes: "That shadow is the future, which will eventually get into even this stronghold and end it all. But until that day comes, why you at least can make merry. And I will help you

"

SO time passed. The visitor was very happy, living in a paradise of wonder and sensation and love such as no man of earth ever had before.

The days of McCarthy's dreaming became many. There were always about him several of the lovely glowing woman-shapes. Their forms were soft and seemed to become almost too perfectly what he most wished they would become, even as he looked and his mind tried to find imperfection, he found only perfection. It was opposite from earth-style love, where one ignores imperfections to think about the better parts and points of the loved one . . . where love is a slow schooling in seeing only the finest facets of one's chosen. Here, he could find no imperfections to ignore, and he had only to imagine some perfection to see it before him.

McCarthy could not consciously know that the heavenly looks of these lovely things was magic, but he had his suspicions, and was always turning around quickly to catch one of them off guard and looking like something other than the featured actress in an extravagant and too-undressed musical comedy. But he never succeeded, and always when he turned quickly he heard the far faint tinkle of bell-like laughter, and that tinkle was somehow not a tinkle, but a deep melodious chime so far away that it was broken into smaller sound by the echo.

"Somebody gets a big kick out of

me," grinned McCarthy, and forgot about it. They waited on him hand and foot; every whim that came into his mind they gratified as soon as it was born. Food of the most exotic kind was set before him whenever he was hungry. When he wanted love, they gave him from a boundless store; though not love such as he knew about. It was instead an ecstasy of an intense and vibrant kind, an overwhelming flame that hovered always about the sweetly glowing bodies of them, a flame that was not anything but the essence of all desires, distilled and intensified by some strong but subtle magic.

But after while it was his sleeping that McCarthy liked the most. For then dreams came visibly into his chambers, and before his mind's eye waved immense phantasmagorical adventures. When one of these adventures caught his fancy it picked him up like a womanish whirlwind of strangely soft, dark arms and he became for the time of his sleep a God, to whom all things were possible and each tiniest part of these dreams was like a flower of unearthly and utterly exquisite beauty.

It was nearly a year by McCarthy's careless reckoning before he determined what was true and what was mere pleasant fantasy in his life.

That was a black day.

He awoke to find his chambers empty. No glowing heavenly shapes to wash him and dress him

and caress him. No sweet laughter in his ears, and no light anywhere but what he made with his almost depleted hand flash.

LIKE a man bereft of reason he rushed away through the endless vaulted cavern halls, seeking, seeking his loved playmates, his glowing angel-shapes. And his heart seemed about to burst in his breast with the terrible sense of loss, like a man who has just lost his family . . . and who thinks he will find them alive if he runs fast enough.

After an endless time of running and walking and panting his hand flash went dark in his hand and he flung it away. He went on like a madman, blind, caroming off the carved stone walls and on and on until at last he sank to the floor in exhaustion.

Lying there, in despair as dark as the utter darkness of the caverns, his eyes began to note after a time a soft glow spreading out before him. Still longer he lay, looking, and his eyes began to see that it was water glowing, rippling softly away before his eyes. The glow strengthened little by little, until he could make out a vast throne-like chair afar above the glowing water.

For a still longer time McCarthy did not believe his eyes, for on the throne was a mighty female figure of dark green flesh.

Her long dripping hair was not hair, but writhed softly about her beautiful head with a life of its own. The great eyes and wide scar-

let mouth were not exactly human, but they were very attractive and kind and somehow lonely with a weight of wisdom. The gleaming shoulders and tremendous long arms ended in wide-webbed fingers. The red tipped breasts, the pillaring waist, the proud arched hips that did not divide into legs but into two great serpentine drivers finned and scaled like the tails of beautiful fish. were to McCarthy after all his dreams but figments of his over-worked imagination.

Peter McCarthy lay silently looking on this new phantasm, wondering if he were still sane, and indeed, if he were still alive, or if this were perhaps a place into which a soul wandered after death—where nothing was as a man expected it to be. And in the midst of his wondering the great lovely sea-woman's head turned. Her eyes sought him out and that unearthly music of her voice murmured—a sound like the surf breaking on ringing rocks far off.

"You had to know the truth some time, Peter McCarthy."

Pete struggled to his feet and found his strength flowing back. And being the kind of man he was he plunged into the dark pool of cool water and swam toward the great throne. It was much farther than it seemed, and when at last he got there he found the throne was as tall as an office building in the great cities of earth, and the lovely mer-woman's body as mighty as a Titan of earth's misty dawn. Big

she was, and just as beautiful close up as from the far shore of her pool.

McCarthy sat on the first step of the throne, at her wide fin that was not a foot at all, and looked up into her lovely tragic eyes, his heart pounding in his breast.

"Sure, sea-mother, I know now! You are the only living creature in all these vast halls, and all the lovely things you have been doing to entertain me you do because you are lonely. Has it been fun to play with me like a toy, sorceress?"

ONE of the great finned hands of her fanned the air in a gesture of negation. "Not too much fun, McCarthy. But interesting, for I have never met a man of your race, so child-like and simple and so easily made to believe in my magic. And have you not enjoyed this year with me?"

"It is not that, sorceress. It is that my heart is snared here. like an ape in a cage and will never again be free. What kind of life can please me now? After this life you have shown me, how can I ever want to breathe common air again?"

Her laugh was like music under water, like bells ringing in the deeps of the sea. Her hand touched him lightly, and the touch was like lightning from heaven striking him with eternal love. And the thunder of that lightning pealed through all his being, thunder on thunder of vast meaning, and there was nothing from his dreams to compare with the beauty and the wonder of the sim-

ple touch of her hand.

McCarthy turned his face up to the vast woman-shape above him, the wonder of her touch shining from his eyes, so that she laughed again as she saw the effect upon him.

"If there had been more like you among my people, I would not be here alone," she murmured, like distant sorrowful music above him, her voice that was so much more than a voice. "But my people were sated with wonder and tired of love and weary with having too much. They went off and left me because I said I wanted to remain—to die. And my heart was sad, but something in me was very glad to be alone. Now I am glad that you are here! But I am afraid that there is no way you can leave now."

McCarthy stretched out at the foot of her throne, a grin on his square Irish face. "So, I can't get away again! Now that's the sorriest word I've heard for years. Sure I'm the unluckiest mortal that ever was born."

The dark goddess laughed again, and there was something of a sweet child in the bell-tones of her laugh, that died away in soft and softer echoes in the endless dark about them.

Something of a shy child, who had never been loved, and found the idea infinitely amusing. Her voice became softer and more beautiful still, and McCarthy was endlessly happy to hear that laugh, for it said so much stronger than any words could—"You are welcome

here, you sad Irishman." And her voice said, "And do you want your angel-shapes and their wine back again, or do you want some other thing I might create for you out of these forgotten energy converters?"

McCarthy grinned contentedly, and rubbed his roughened face against the smooth calf of her leg beside him. "D'ye think I should shave, goddess?"

The great beautiful face bent over and examined his Irish countenance, the rugged features and twinkling blue eyes and the red hearty cheeks of him. "Why, man-child, you are quite good-looking as you are!"

"And as for them angels and their wine," added McCarthy, "don't you know one look at you is worth a thousand angels? Can't you see in my mind and know . . . I forget, ye've been doing that for one solid year. Sure, you green angel you, why should a man want any other shape or sound or wine than yourself?"

SO it was that some years later a great ship burst up from the seas of the lonely planet and on the terrific wings of a mysterious power shot silently away into the trackless void. And at the helm was a red-cheeked Irishman and the rest of the vast ship was filled with water and the goddess herself. All of it, that is, except the part where the three little McCarthys came out of the water to play with their dad every day.



THE INVADER

By

Alfred Coppel

Invading Earth was going to be a cinch, the Triomed scout decided. But to make certain he must study its inhabitants — as one of them!

THE Triomed advanced stealthily across the floor of the dark cell toward the sleeping figure huddled in the corner. After the long, lonely voyage, the near-

ness to a host filled the Triomed with eager anticipation.

The tiny spaceship that had carried him into this lush planetary system far from the galaxy's heart



lay well hidden behind him. So far as he could tell, his descent had not been detected, and that was as it should be—for he was a Triomed and a scientist. One of the finest in the service of his dying race. Dying that is, until now, he thought. No longer would the race of Triomedes weaken and die for lack of suitable hosts. This third planet of the yellow sun was a paradise thick with warmblooded biped mammals

The sleeping creature stirred uneasily, as though sensing the approach of danger. The Triomed froze into immobility. It was unlikely that he could be seen, he knew, though the sense of sight was only a synthesized abstraction to him. It was not one of his own proper senses, but he had been able to detect at long distance that almost every living creature on this planet received impressions through certain specialized organs mounted on and within their structure. There were plants, of course, as there were on Triom, but they were unimportant.

There were viruses, too, and he had been afraid when he had discovered this fact that he had arrived too late. But the first attempts at establishing communication had relieved the Triomed of his fears. The indigenous viruses were primitive; not at all like his own illustrious ancestors of ancient Triom.

The sleeping biped relaxed and the Triomed inched forward again, a flat, almost two dimensional smear of glistening matter on the

floor in front of the biped.

From high above the planet's night side, the Triomed had sensed the city. He had absorbed its shape and size and meaning while his craft settled through the heavy, oxygen-rich air. It was not enough that his instruments told of suitable hosts. He was a scientist and believed in absolute proof. Also, he had been in space long—without the satisfaction of a host—and he yearned for the rapport, the domination of a warm-blooded creature.

There had been a dark segment in the brilliant pattern of the city. An island of solitude amid the myriad confluences. It was there that he had landed his tiny probe ship and hidden it among the thickly wooded glades. Almost immediately he had sensed the nearness of many creatures. Insects, plants, warm-blooded quadrupeds and bipeds. There had been machines and buildings and winding roadways among the trees. Darkness had covered his progress until at last he found himself near the sleeping creature, ready to infiltrate and take command.

THE glistening shape elongated, became a thread-like tendril of almost gossamer thickness. It touched the flesh of the sleeper and thrilled with pleasure. Cautiously, the Triomed moved up the hairy leg, an invisible strand of alien life close to the warm skin. Presently, the strand found the opening it sought. It slithered imperceptibly into the

moist warmth of the sleeper's nostril, moved through the tear-duct into the space behind the eyeball. Here it probed through muscle and membrane along the base of the brain, seeking the pineal gland.

And found it, penetrated it, coiling like a microscopic serpent within the gland. A surge of pleasure went through the Triomed. Here was safety. The host was large, powerful and vibrant with life. Quickly, the Triomed established dominance. It was shockingly easy. The creature's mind was immature, primitive. Briefly it struggled and then died as the alien poisoned the identity centers of the brain.

New sensations poured in through unfamiliar sense organs. Sounds of the faraway city, small sounds from the many living creatures in the darkness. Smells and sights and pressures from all about him presented themselves—were evaluated and recorded in the atomic structure of the Triomed.

He was now equipped, he reflected with satisfaction, to carry out further exploration. In the guise of the indigenous biped, he could roam among the natives at will. He remained in a sitting position, however, while he familiarized himself with his host.

He had two articulated appendages fixed to the trunk at a point near and below the skull-case. These ended in complex extremities consisting of five jointed fingers. The same pattern was repeated at the lower end of the trunk,

but the extremities were suited there for the carrying of the creature's considerable weight. Within the trunk were the customary viscera generally associated with warm-blooded beings: lungs, intestines, stomach, liver, bladder, reproductive organs and assorted ducted and ductless glands. It was apparent to the Triomed that his present body was in excellent health. He was greatly pleased.

After some careful experiments, the Triomed rose. If there was a proper method of egress from the cubicle in which he found himself, it was not imprinted on the biped's brain. For a moment this gave the alien pause. He could, of course, determine the proper method by a tedious process of trial and error, but that would take time and he had no desire to waste the hours of darkness. One wall, he noted, consisted of vertical risers fixed in the substance of the floor and ceiling. Beyond, he could see the darkling woods and the sky-glow of the city. The answer, then, was simple force. He did not doubt there was strength enough in the host's musculature to distort the risers.

His assumption was quite correct.

STEPPING through the bent risers, he picked his way along a narrow walkway lined with cubicles similar to the one he had left. Within them, dark shapes moved or lay sleeping. Some were alert, others were not. But none gave an alarm.

The Triomed reached the end of the walk, scaled a fence easily and stood on a surface of wet grass that sloped away from the low dark building toward the woods.

Behind him he heard a shout. A narrow beam of light pierced the night, swinging to and fro with a searching motion. He had a fleeting glimpse of a small biped running down the walk toward the cubicle he had deserted.

The Triomed broke toward the wood with a long loping pace that covered the ground with unbelievable swiftness. The probing light did not find him. Once among the trees he paused and took his bearings. The woods were not thick. He could see the lights of the city through the foliage. They began at the very edge of the trees, where a wide open area could be discerned. Wheeled vehicles moved past with breathtaking speed.

If there was pursuit, it was inefficient, for the Triomed moved through the woods undisturbed until he stood at the edge of the avenue, sheltered by the shadow of a large tree. Most of the traffic was vehicular, he noted. There were few pedestrians. From the noise and odor he classified the vehicles as being powered by internal combustion engines burning hydro-carbons. Primitive. That was good, he reflected. When the fleets of Triom descended on this planet, there would be no science worthy of the name to oppose them.

He waited until there was an in-

terval in the traffic, and then stepped out confidently, crossing the avenue. As he reached the opposite side he heard a screech of brakes and a garbled, choking sound. He did not turn to discover the source of the disturbance until he had reached the shelter of a building on the far side of the walk bordering the street.

A vehicle had stopped at an oblique angle to the lane in which it was travelling, and its single occupant, a very pale-faced biped was goggling stupidly in the direction of the hidden Triomed.

For the first time, the alien being felt a twinge of apprehension. Certainly he had done nothing out of the ordinary in crossing the open space on foot? But perhaps there were tribal taboos and traditions among the natives that could not be ignored without attracting attention.

The Triomed promised himself that he would exercise more caution in such matters. Too much depended on this reconnaissance to allow it to be disturbed by carelessness.

He worked his way through the shadows between the many buildings until the wide highway was far behind him. He was very aware of the teeming life all about him—in the buildings, in the vehicles on the streets. Still, some odd impulse that stemmed from the numbed brain of his host rather than his own, kept him fairly hidden. This, he decided with something akin to annoyance, was not as it should be. If his sur-

vey were to be of any value, he must roam at will and without fear of detection, secure in his disguise.

PRESENTLY he came upon a street where streams of bipeds jostled one another, each seemingly intent upon its own particular incomprehensible errands. For a long while he watched from the shelter of an alley doorway, classifying and integrating the information his host's sharp eyes brought him. It was miraculous. Hosts of every size and description were in abundance—an unlimited supply of them. Enough for the whole population of Triom. It was beyond belief, but he could not doubt. And this was but a single concentration. A single city. From the stratosphere he had seen hundreds of similar cities. Paradise! He envisioned the fleets of Triom descending, the Triomedes emerging and infiltrating. The thoughts brought pride and anticipation. It had been so easy

He decided not to linger. He felt now that he had his proofs and that he should return at once to his ship. Triom must be told immediately. The communicator in the ship could carry the message as soon as the craft reached a suitable distance from planetary mass. He would return, send the ship aloft, dispatch his message and then return to his host to await the others of his race.

His decision made, he stepped confidently out into the throng of bipeds, seeking the shortest route back to his hidden craft.

The result was instantaneous and amazing.

The crowd drew back with a howling, shrieking noise, leaving him standing in the center of a circle of dead white faces.

Behind the first row of bipeds, he could see others running in every direction, and screaming at the top of their voices. The racket, combined with the noises of the city, was most unpleasant. The Triomed began to be afraid.

He broke into a rapid walk, and the crowd parted before him with much louder screeching. Here and there a biped, apparently braver than the rest, made threatening motions with bundles or knotted fists. A package struck him on the shoulder.

The Triomed began to run. He noted for the first time that he towered head and shoulders over most of the bipeds nearby, and his host's brain interpreted the smells of hate and fear all about him.

The crowd scattered wildly at his approach, but he was being followed. Panic began to clutch at the alien. What had he done wrong? Somewhere a wailing sound began—vehicles with glaring red lights swept past him with vicious, explosive noises. He felt a stinging pain in one leg, and glanced down to see it streaked with red.

Ahead of him a line of bipeds all clothed in identical blue sacs of fabric had formed, spilling from the vehicles as they halted. The Triomed stopped, sensing mortal danger.

Behind him, the mob rumbled. Ahead the blue bipeds stood holding artifacts that the Triomed did not for an instant doubt were weapons.

No street opened on either side of him. He was trapped between the weapons, the mob, and two tall buildings. He hesitated only for a moment. With a desperate leap, he reached the second level of windows of the building nearest him and clung there, gasping.

A white-faced creature appeared and began poking at him with a steel rod that burned like fire when it touched his host's flesh. The creature screamed shrilly all the while.

With a sob, the Triomed swung himself onto the window ledge and began climbing upward, toward the roof of the building. It was slow work and the pain in his leg and burned shoulder slowed him down. He dare not free himself of his host now, for he was much too far from his ship to be able to return in his natural form.

THERE were searchlights in the street below, probing at him as he clung to the sheer facade of the building. Panic drove him upward. A continuous, wailing roar rose from the canyon below, a fear-laden hideous cacophony. The Triomed felt himself weak with terror, part of which was his host's and part of which stemmed from within himself. The terror and fear of not knowing what had gone wrong and why he stood now in such peril.

At last he reached the roof. He heaved himself over the parapet and lay for a moment, flanks heaving painfully. Then he stiffened with a new fear. He was not alone. The roof was occupied. A score or more of armed bipeds blocked him into a triangular corner of the roof. He got to his feet and stumbled backward. Their weapons were aimed at him. He retreated until the parapet stopped him, warning of the sheer drop to the street far below.

A figure separated itself from the armed mass. A flash of recognition came—partially his own, partially his host's. It was the small biped he had seen in the searchlight beam running toward the cubicle he had deserted so long ago it seemed.

The small creature began speaking, making soft, soothing noises, advancing all the while, a tiny glass vial in his hands.

Without knowing why, the Triomed felt his lips pull away from his teeth in a snarl. He heard a deep, rumbling growling sound in his own throat. The biped stopped, and the Triomed could smell his sudden fear.

He felt a surge of incomprehensible rage come over him — he crouched menacingly.

The creature took a step closer. Another. The Triomed tensed.

The creature was within reach, extending the vial. The alien could see that it was tipped with a sliver of steel. He sprang—

The weapons crashed. The alien felt the thudding impact of pro-

jectiles penetrating the brain case. In a panic he began to extrude from the pineal gland. If death overcame the host while he had rapport, he, too, would die. And if he died, Triom would die.

He felt his huge body totter. There was another blast from the weapons and he sensed the projectile coming—with what seemed to be agonizing slowness to his quickened senses. It was spinning in the darkness. It struck the eye, smashed it, moved inward, along the base of the brain . . .

The Triomed felt one deep, searing agony that was his alone as the bullet crushed him. The hot metal

acrid touch was the last thing he knew before death came . . .

* * *

The policemen stood about in a circle, staring down in mixed awe and relief at the huge body on the roof.

"I've seen him a dozen times in the park," one said. "He always seemed so—so peaceable." He shook his head. "What in hell do you suppose came over him?"

The keeper looked up from where he knelt over the deep, still chest, bloody and riddled with bullets. "It happens like this sometimes," he said. "You can never tell about gorillas."

THE END

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF IMAGINATION, Stories of Science and Fantasy, published monthly except March, July and November at Evanston, Illinois for February, 1953.

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5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails, or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only.)

WILLIAM L. HAMLING, Editor, Publisher

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 16th day of September, 1952.

(SEAL)

WENZEL A. PELZ

(My commission expires May 27, 1956)

PIONEER

By William Hardy

If you could travel through time to a few years hence you'd find a stone monument in honor and memory of a brave deed you may shy away from!

I DIDN'T much like the way Max—that's the guy who trained me—fastened the broad leather straps over my body. There was a smell of nervous excitement in the air and Max's hand trembled as he fumbled with the buckles. Thinking back on it, the whole morning had been like that. Nervous and excited.

Right after breakfast, Max had given me a good bath and loaded me in the car. I always like to ride in the car and this time Max even allowed me to stick my head out the window. He doesn't usually let me do that, but I was too engrossed in the exhilarating rush of air to pay any attention to the change of routine. When we drew up in front of a large brick building a multitude of strange and peculiar odors assailed my nose, tantalizingly anonymous. Max's big hand caught me before I got halfway through the window. That disgusted me, because I wanted to investigate the funny smells, and I pouted all the way into the building. As the events of the next hour

progressed I got madder and madder.

First there was the doctor, poking around in my mouth, stabbing my eyes with a blinding beam of light, and prodding and squeezing my body. It reminded me of the day I came to live with Max and I was tempted to take a hunk out of this doctor's hand like I did the other one. But Max was there and that stopped me. I didn't want to see the hurt look that would come to his eyes every time I did something wrong.

After the doctor finished Max led me into a gleaming white room where I was surrounded by a gushing mob of women dressed in white uniforms. Their "Ohs!" and "Ahs!" and "Isn't he beautiful!"—I'm not beautiful and I detest the description—put the finishing touch to what had once been a wonderful day. I flopped to the floor, trying to ignore them. Then, indignities of indignities, one of the "girls" tried to pick up my eighty pounds of blue-gray masculinity. That was the last straw!

I let out a deep-throated growl, and sprang clear of her encircling arms. Fangs bared, ears flat against my head, I must have presented a terrifying appearance to the women, because they fled to all corners of the room, squealing and bleating like a bunch of sheep.

For the fun of it, I made a short dash at the one who had tried to pick me up. With a high-pitched scream she slumped to the floor in a dead faint. I could hardly keep from laughing as I turned to search for a new victim. About this time Max came barging through the door and grabbed me by the scruff of the neck, putting an end to my fun. He wasn't mad, although he pretended to be, and I could detect the humor in his voice while he scolded me.

Back in the car again, Max roared with laughter while patting me on the head and saying, "You old devil, you!" in that special way he has when amused at something I've done. When he finally got control of himself, he started the car and drove in the direction of the funny smells. As the smells got stronger, I began to get uneasy. Looking at Max, I sensed that he was uneasy too. "What was going on?" I wondered as the car dipped down a ramp and entered a dimly lit cave where the smells became overpowering.

The cave was jammed with huge tank-trucks and that was where the strange smells were coming from. I don't know what was in the trucks,

but Max said something about nitric acid and hydrozine fuel when he noticed my interest in them. Leaving the car, we walked down a short passage branching off the cave, climbed a couple flights of stairs and emerged in the bright sunlight. I nearly yipped in surprise as I caught sight of the over-grown thing beside me. It looked for all the world like a giant cigar that had been cut in half and stood on end. There were still three or four trucks around the base of the thing and a kind of fear spread through my mind. The magic of the strange smells was gone and here, at close quarters, the smell was raw and uninviting.

MAX led me to a group of men and they talked for a few minutes. I didn't pay much attention to what they said until one of them, a big man with a lot of stars on his shoulder, reached down and patted my back. "Better get him loaded," said the Starman. "Only ten minutes till blast-off."

Max led me to a kind of open-air elevator and started up the side of the gleaming monster. At the top Max put me into a padded cage inside the cigar, fastened the straps, and patted me. Then he was gone and a large door slid into place, leaving me in vile smelling, pitch darkness. I lay there quietly, but the uneasy feeling kept getting worse. A sudden hissing noise nearly scared me to death; then I

remembered my training. The hissing was only air, the same as had been in the cage at home, and wouldn't hurt me. Even so, I struggled against the straps, trying to reach them with my teeth. Nothing doing and again I lay quiet—waiting.

I must have dozed off because the next thing I knew my cage was trembling violently and a powerful roaring dinned in my ears. This lasted only a second, then something crushed my body flat in the cage. My legs grew heavy and a racking, tearing pain ripped at my muscles. A black film blotted out the lighter blackness of my cage.

I don't know what happened in the interval, but when I came to the roar was gone and my body felt like it was floating in the air. My head felt swollen and I experienced some difficulty in swallowing. I couldn't hear a thing except the hiss of air and I was suddenly overcome by the feeling that I was a long way from home.

Slowly I became aware that my body was regaining its weight. The cage was becoming quite warm now and I licked my nose, wishing for a cold drink of water. Suddenly I was jerked against the straps and I forgot all about my other troubles. The jerks didn't hurt me as much as they scared me. I had experienced somewhat the same thing when Max hit the car brakes hard, but he wasn't here to pat me reassuringly.

The cage was getting real hot now and the jerks were coming with increasing frequency. The air had stopped too and I desperately wanted a drink. The last thing I remember before the crash was wishing that Max would open the door and let me out like he always had at home.

Max's gentle voice sounded a long way off. "Good boy!" he kept repeating. "Good boy!" I couldn't find the strength to open my eyes so I just lay quietly and listened to the talk, thankful that the smell, that had penetrated the entire day, was gone now.

"I was afraid that those parachutes wouldn't cut the speed enough to get him down alive," said the Starman who had patted my back earlier.

"No sign of radiation," said a strange voice. "His blood count is normal and he isn't hurt physically unless there are internal injuries."

"What about his weakness?" asked Max, patting me.

"You'd be weak too, if you had been through the ordeal he has," said Strange-voice. "He'll get over that soon and live to father a good many space-puppies."

Strange-voice was absolutely right in his forecast and it's with pardonable fatherly pride that I lead each new family to the great stone monument which reads: "*In honor of Rex, a German Shepherd dog, who pioneered man's first flight into outer space.*"

Probing The Body With Sound!

THE use of super-sonic waves for such things as submarine detection, flaw detection in metals—is a simple practical technique. Even schools of fish are located with sonic ranging gadgets! The system depends upon generating a high frequency (usually inaudible) sound, beaming it, and awaiting its reflection from a foreign object.

Medicine, which is becoming more and more curious about the products of modern physical labs, has taken a crack at this sound-detection system for its diagnosing problems. A little crystal oscillator generates a high frequency sound. This beam of sound is played over the suspected portion of the human anatomy. When

the beam enters the body it passes through painlessly. But when from the regular flesh and bone — it encounters something different — say a tumor or a cancerous mass, it is reflected and bounced back. By reading the instrument, the diagnostician can accurately locate the obstruction and make preparations to remove it. The technique is similar to x-ray examination except that there is no danger of radiation burns —also it is much easier to perform.

Tumors, gallstones, embedded missiles, masses of water—have all been effectively detected with this sonic probe and it will soon be a standard diagnostic method.

★ *Grow Your Own Home!* ★

SCIENCE-FICTION is still in the lead and regular scientific advances have to do a lot more impressive things before they catch up with typewriter scientists. Where this is best demonstrated is in biology and botany, two fields of science whose ramifications are just being appreciated.

The writer imagines a time when botanists will be able to so manipulate the life-force in plants that it will be possible literally to "grow" a tree-house, which will contain everything from the utilities to air-conditioning through leaf-surfaces. That concept is ingenious!

Nor is it as fantastic as it may seem at a first thought. Botanists today are doing wonderful things with plants and a recent announcement shows that the idea of modify-

ing plants to suit the intentions of its human users, is far from remote. The method is this: to protect lumber and timber from insects and rot, chemicals are used. Usually the timber is painted or soaked in the chemical from which it absorbs its protection. This is a slow, tedious, expensive process, by no means efficient.

But the new technique, just being explored, involves feeding the protective chemicals in the form of plant food, to the roots, where during ordinary growth and development, the tree absorbs the material into every pore and fiber. Then when it is cut down, it is completely impregnated with the protective agency. The tree has been modified in the process of growth—the very suggestion of the s-f writer!



Conducted by Mari Wolf

IT was the Sunday before the start of the Tenth World Science Fiction Convention, and we were as gloomy as could be. We weren't going to Chicago. We'd planned on driving leisurely east from California, taking the Forrest Ackermans along for company, but Rog had somehow acquired a sinus infection and was now spending his time in and out of the hospital.

Sunday came and went, but we stayed. Monday the doctor worked Rog over again and he came home feeling a bit better. Tuesday it was, of course, much too late to start driving to Chicago. No one in his right mind would do it. So we started. Seven P. M. Tuesday we plunged off down the Cusenberry Grade into the desert, and off toward the Convention, 2300 miles away.

Fifty-three hours later, at 3 A. M. Friday morning Chicago time, we arrived in Evanston. It had been just the sort of trip to get one ready for an exciting weekend. A thousand miles every twenty-four hours, no rest stops, almost no meal stops. We'd taken turns sleeping in the back seat

and we ate out of sacks of groceries we bought along the way. But somehow we beat the bus, and the Ackermans, into town.

And when, on Saturday morning, we finally decamped at the Hotel Morrison, the trip had suddenly been worth it a dozen times over. For this was the Tenth Convention—the biggest and the best, the kind that in retrospect you can't quite believe in, the kind you can't help feeling will never come again.

Almost a year before, in late September, 1951, we'd been in Chicago. We had attended one of the first, or maybe it was the first, of the convention committee's meetings. Now, here on the opening day, with the tentative plans now realities, the convention room that had once been under consideration now packed with people, it just didn't seem possible. Could it be true that the last time we saw the Hamlings and Bea Mahaffey and chairman Julian May they weren't even sure the Convention would be at the Morrison? That Hugo Gernsback would consent to be the guest of honor?

It must have been stranger to us, as we went in to join the long line at the Convention registration desk, than it could have been to the committee members, for between the day of that early meeting and August 30, 1952 had stretched the months that they had worked and thought and created to bring the tentatively outlined plans into actuality. But for us there were only the discrete days, separated in time, the day we had been in Chicago before, and now, the day that had been so distant then . . .

It wasn't like any Convention before it. Maybe there won't ever be another one like it. For one thing, it was big, much bigger than even the committee had expected it to be. There were fifteen hundred who sent in their dollars to join the rosters and be part of the convention. Even though about five hundred couldn't come there were still a thousand and fifty known to be in the hall. And there might have been more.

It started, for me at any rate, when I walked into the lobby of the Morrison, scanned the lines of people all signing in for the convention and looked about me for a familiar face. I found two. Since we'd just arrived from California, naturally I didn't spot any Chicagoans right off. Instead it was Forry Ackerman, our erstwhile passenger, and E. Everett Evans.

Before we'd even got registered we'd planned the return trip to take Forry and Wendy Ackerman and Walt Willis with us to Los Angeles.

Walt Willis All over the convention you'd see people wearing little ribbons, WAW, Walter A. Willis. He's a fan from Belfast, North Ireland, and he puts out one of the very best of the fanzines—SLANT. For a long time before the convention opened there was a move on to

import Walt for the festivities. It was one of those things you would think would never be accomplished.

But it was. Due largely to the efforts of Shelby Vick and a few other fans the fare was raised, reservations were made, and the Atlantic crossing carried off.

WE had heard strange stories about Walt. The boat that brought him across the Atlantic was a day late. That made him miss his plane connections to Chicago, so he came by busses. Three of them. They kept breaking down

We wondered what strange effect he had on machinery!

"If we get car trouble while Walt's with us," Rog said, "out he goes. He can walk to Los Angeles" (But we didn't. Walt, the car, and all the rest of us got along fine all across the country.)

But back to the convention. We finally got moved into our room and, once our baggage was deposited, we went off down to the mezzanine floor to be registered and pick up our programs and name tags. There were dozens of people in line already. There had been dozens of people in line all morning. The harassed registrars were running short of booklets, and it was quite a job getting everyone ticketed and collecting dollars from those who hadn't sent in their memberships in advance. I guess it was then that the committee members realized they were going to have hundreds more attending than had been expected.

There were so many people that it was almost impossible finding any specific one. Of course we met just about everyone we knew—you couldn't turn around without bumping in to old friends from Chicago, New York, or the Portland Convention. Editors, writers, fans . . . We hadn't

been in the hotel an hour before Jim Webbert showed up. Just as at the Portland Convention, he was the Man Friday. Reach for a cigarette and he would have a lighted one all ready for you. Look around for a drink—anything from a highball to a glass of milk—and Jim would have it for you before you even knew you wanted it. He'd been amazing enough in Portland, where there were only about a quarter as many people, but how he kept track of so many in that huge Morrison Hotel I'll never know. He literally was a hundred places at once, and in addition to being handy, he was a walking information directory. He had everyone's room number—even those he wouldn't tell you because they were "unlisted."

We ended by giving Jim a ride back to his home in Salt Lake City too

But it was hard finding people you knew only by name. There were just too many faces. I know several people were there whom I wanted to meet, but never got to. Still, there were some unusual get-togethers. Like the man who walked up to me and asked me, "Didn't you live in Laguna Beach?" and when I said yes he asked me if I knew his brother, who also lived there—and his brother is our family dentist!

We met Raoul Bru, a Cuban fan who has been corresponding with Rog. It was Raoul's first Convention, and he went away so enthusiastic that he wants to start a fan group in Havana and bid for a Convention there one of these years. That's one place I'd vote for—a Cuban vacation!

Speeches humorous and serious . . . The debate between Ray Palmer and Willy Ley over flying saucers . . . The line that will probably be the classic one of the convention, spoken

by Willy Ley in regard to the saucers. "You always see them from below." . . . Finally hearing Robert Bloch in one of his hilarious talks, and finding that despite all the people who've kept telling you how funny he is, he's really ten times funnier . . . The panel discussions held by editors and publishers on science fiction . . .

But most of all, the banquet. And guest of honor Hugo Gernsback, the father of modern science fiction. It was really a privilege to hear him, and to hear those early days of stff, now a quarter of a century behind us, come alive again.

Of course, the formal part of the program was only part of the convention. There were many other parts. The meeting with old friends and new. The parties, some of them held all night long. But, alas, unlike Portland, we never once saw the house detective.

WAY up on the forty-second floor the Little Men held their parties. They're the Little Men's Chowder, Marching, and Science Fiction Society, and they put on a great bid to hold next year's convention in San Francisco. We West Coasters were all rooting for them, of course, but the Convention was voted in at Philadelphia, and that's where the Eleventh Annual World Science Fiction Convention will be held. And it won't be too long now before you'll be getting a lot of advance information on that one.

This Convention had all the features that have become traditional, plus many more. There was the auction, where fans could buy the original covers and interior illustrations from the professional magazines, all the art work being donated and the proceeds going to clad space

heroines and red devils and bems.

But one of the high points of the entertainment to me was something brand new—the science fiction ballet. I admit I was extremely prejudiced against the idea of it until I saw it. I've never liked amateur ballet. But this one wasn't amateur, in performance. The music, composed by Convention Chairman Julian May (in her spare time? It seems impossible!) and Bob Johnson, really held the spirit of science fiction, and so did the dancing. A most pleasant surprise on the final night of the Convention.

One of the distinctive things about this Convention was the number of people who read about it in the papers or heard about it on the radio—it was very well publicized—and just dropped in. Lots of those who were there, whose name tags gave their home city as Chicago, weren't people who had attended science fiction clubs or collected stf literature or artwork. They were just science fiction readers, people who liked science fiction and fantasy stories and dropped in when they heard there was going to be an stf convention in town. And they were having a wonderful time

Like the man who hadn't even heard about it until the day before the Convention, but who, when the voting was over, was telling everyone that next year he was certainly going to make it to Philadelphia

In a way I envied him, because there's nothing quite like your first stf convention. This was my second, Rog's third. This, though, was the one we'd been looking forward to all year, the big one where everyone would be, the one we wouldn't miss no matter what happened. But an stf convention is certainly something that can never become dull and ordinary—not to me at least. There

are always too many old friends going to be there. And lots of new friends, undiscovered as yet.

So, like a typical science fiction fan, I'm not only looking back on Chicago, I'm already planning to be at Philadelphia next year.

Now to the fanzines:

First off, there's a card from Bob Kessler in which he asks me to announce the formation of an stf fan club for teenagers. "We need members badly and urge anybody interested to write *Infinity* 8042 Vantage Ave., No. Hollywood, Calif. As for the club's activities, they are not clear right now since the club has just been formed, but we plan to publish a fanzine (not yet named) in the near future."

How about it, gang?

* * *

GHUVNA: 10c; Joe Fillinger Jr., 148 Landon St., Buffalo 8, N. Y. In the issue I have here you get seventy full-sized pages for only a dime, which is a lot of quantity—and you get some of the top fan fiction and articles to boot. How come? Well, Editor Fillinger gives one of the reasons in his hilarious account of being invited to a party, or gathering, given by Uncle Sam—a party which turned out to be a pre-induction physical. . . One of the best accounts of what it's like to be poked, jabbed and tested down the line that I've ever read. (Makes me glad for the umpteenth time that I'm a gal-type critter.)

My favorite among several good stories was Marian Zimmer Bradley's "Adventure in Charin," which was surprising to find in an amateur magazine. Seems to me it would have sold easily to a professional market.

All in all, I hope there are a lot more issues of Ghuvna before ye ed is called off to the services. It would

be a good buy at a quarter a copy.

* * *

SCIENCE FICTION ADVERTISER: 20c; bimonthly; 1745 Kenneth Road, Glendale 1, Calif. I know that this magazine is primarily an advertising medium wherein collectors can buy or sell their fantasy and science fiction books, magazines and artwork. I know too that it's an invaluable magazine for the serious sf collector.

And yet, to me it isn't that at all. To me the Advertiser is one of the best 20c packages of non-fiction reading on science fiction, science, and related subjects you can find on the market.

In the issue I have here, for instance there's Clyde Beck's article "*Dichtung — oder Wahrheit?* Philosophy: From Fantasy to Fact," an article on the material and approach found in Hans Reichenbach's "The Rise of Scientific Philosophy." It's not only informative and thought-provoking, but it makes me, at least, want very much to read the book.

If you're interested in the background material of science fiction, you'll like the Advertiser. And if you're a collector, you'll just about need it.

* * *

TLMA: 25c; bimonthly; Lynn A. Hickman, 239 E. Broad, Statesville, North Carolina. Here's the fanzine (fan magazine, in answer to all of you who've found the abbreviation a bit confusing) published for The Little Monsters of America, a science-fantasy organization with headquarters in Statesville. And branches in lots of other cities, I would guess from the number of Little Monsters in evidence at the Convention . . .

In the issue I have here there's a very good short story, Basil Well's "Draftee," which when he wrote it

back in 1943 was considered too off-trail. It's based on the idea of a war in the future in which the factory is more dangerous a target than the front lines, so that women fly on the bombing raids while men stay home to be bombed. Even from just reading the newspapers you know that the idea's far from off-trail now, in just nine short years.

* * *

FANTASTIC WORLDS: 25c; quarterly; Edward W. Ludwig, 1942 Telegraph Ave., Stockton, Calif. Here's a new amateur fantasy magazine of the highest quality throughout—in its printed format, in its artwork, and in its stories and articles. The contributors for the first issue, which I have here, include many of fantasy's and fandom's greats—August Derleth, Walt Willis (no wonder he has such a captivatingly droll way of writing; he's like that himself), Forrest J. Ackerman (with a story entitled "All Cremated Equal") and Clark Ashton Smith.

And Toby Duane has a weird little story titled "The Soul Seekers," in which the souls of animals become visible. All different souls. Those of wild animals, of tame animals—and of men . . .

Fantastic Worlds hits top quality the very first issue.

* * *

SCIENCE FICTION NEWSSCOPE: 5c; monthly; Phil Gordon, 43 Tremont St., Malden 48, Mass. Here's a chatty little newsheet covering various aspects of the sf world. The issue I have here is largely devoted to news about the professional magazines, and if you like to know what's going on before it happens, you can find out here.

Also there are usually personality sketches of fans, as well as news of foreign and domestic fanzines.

* * *

JOURNAL OF SCIENCE FICTION 1951 MAGAZINE INDEX: 25c; Edward Wood, 1331 W. Newport Ave., Chicago 13, Ill. The index appears as the number three issue of the Journal, which is published irregularly by Charles Freudenthal and Edward Wood, and which is one of the most literary of the amateur fantasy publications. This issue, however, is devoted entirely to indexing the magazines, title by title and issue by issue—and a fine job it is, too.

Listed are the stories, length of story, author, illustrator, and cover story and artist. It's something every collector will want, I'm sure.

* * *

BREVZINE: 10c; monthly; Warren A. Freiberg, 5018 West 18th St., Cicero 50, Illinois. Here's a small, pocket-sized, mimeoed fanzine that contains a lot of meat. Stories—including serials, darn it, articles, and book reviews. The issue following the one I have here, which will be the November one, will be devoted to an interview with a certain William L. Hamling and his Madge. That's one issue I'm really looking forward to reading! (It'll be out before you read this, so you could get a copy for one thin dime!)

* * *

FANTASY TIMES: 10c; twice a month; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 Thirty-second Ave., Flushing 54, N. Y. Fantasy-Times is back in mimeograph format again, as increased production costs would have meant an increase in price if the photo-offset format had been retained. But it's still the same newspaper of science fiction, your best bet as a source for all news of interest in the field.

F-T covers the publishing field closely, and often gets scoops on magazine policy changes before they

are announced anywhere else. If you read this newszine (news magazine), you'll know what's going on in the science fiction world.

* * *

THE FEMZINE: 15c; quarterly; Marian Cox, 79th. A.B. Sq., Sioux City, Iowa. The Femzine is published by and for Fanettes, a new all-girl fan club. Editor Cox writes me, "For the benefit of those male fans who will undoubtedly hoot and jeer at the idea, I'd like to state that this is most definitely a *science-fiction* fan club; not just a group of gossip-minded women." And the fanzine, written entirely by the girls (twenty-seven of them already in the club) has some really good material, such as Nancy Share's story of an unnatural small boy, "The Little Monster."

No contributions accepted from men. I don't know if men can even buy the Femzine—but come on, all you girls, here's a fanzine and a club for you, where no one will be insinuating you ought to be home in the kitchen. (Yeah, it's happened to me too)

* * *

SCIENCE FANTASY BULLETIN: 15c; monthly; Harlan Ellison, 12701 Shaker Blvd., Apt. 616, Cleveland 20, Ohio. You'll find a bit of everything in this mimeoed fanzine—stories, articles, columns, (including Marion Zimmer Bradley's fanzine review column), and poetry. In the issue I have here there's something rather special, "Palmer on Asbestos." Quite a few fans at Chicago were grabbing copies from Harlan to read that one article.

There's a clever little time travel story by Lonny Lunde, called "Past Tense", in which a writer gets revenge three years ago. Clever twist to that one.

* * *

OOPSLA: 10c; every six weeks; Gregg Calkins, 761 Oakley St., Salt Lake City 16, Utah. If you want some lighthearted fannish humor you won't have to look any farther than Oopsla, though a few gags are a little difficult for an outsider to decipher. (Such as what is the meaning of Proxyboo, ltd?)

Walt Willis has an article on "Willis Discovers America," which has him and Shelby Vick escaping from jail by shortcircuiting the lighting system in Greater New York. (If Rog had read it after the episode of the three broken down busses, he'd never have let Walt into the car . . .)

Anyway, here's one humorous fanzine where the humor really comes off.

* * *

A CHECKLIST OF FANTASTIC MAGAZINES: Bradford M. Day, 127-01 116th Ave., S. Ozone Park 20, N. Y. As Bradford Day writes, "It's a listing by date, volume, and number, of 167 fantasy magazine titles; about 3500 issues of those 167 magazines."

This checklist is for collectors only, as it gives information on what issues of what magazines were published in what months, and what their volume numbers were. To me it is, I fear, completely unintelligible, but I am not a collector. To a collector though, its coverage of some of the rare magazines in the field would doubtless be valuable.

* * *

OPERATION FANTAST: and *Operation Fantast Handbook*; Capt. K. K. Slater, 13 Gp. R.P.C., B.A.O.R., 29, c/o G.P.O., England. Subscription in the U.S. 75c, which covers four issues of O.F. magazine, all newsletters during the subscription period, and membership in *Operation Fantast*.

O.F. runs all sorts of services for

its members all over the English speaking world. It has a lending library through which you can rent sf literature, a trading bureau, a year book which covers the complete fantasy field, fandom included.

Captain Slater writes that work on the 1953 Handbook begins in December, 1952, and wants information from you right away on your fan clubs and fanzines if you wish to be included in the directory section. He wants to know the title of your club or zine, address, publication schedule, prices—single and subscription, word rates paid for material, and frequency of club meetings.

Why not send it in right away? You might make a lot of friends all over the world

* * *

VARIANT WORLDS: 15c; every six weeks; Shel Deretchin, 1234 Utica, Brooklyn 3, N.Y. In this issue the stories seem devoted to BEMs. (A BEM is a Bug-Eyed Monster, such as appear on covers of science fiction magazines chasing girls who are more suitably clad for a day at the beach than a light-year in outer space.)

Marion Cox has a story in which she has a pet BEM named Cookie. Stephanie Szold has a story in which she has a perfect devil of a BEM, literally, named 7x6231. I. Kantrowitz has a BEM named Rastor. If there are any others of the species in the zine, I missed them.

Anyway, most of them are rather lighthearted monsters

* * *

Well, that's all for now. So until next issue, remember to keep sending those fanzines to me, Mari Wolf, Fandora's Box, IMAGINATION, P. O. Box 230, Evanston, Ill.

And see you all at the Convention next year, I hope!

—Mari Wolf—



TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN SCIENCE-FICTION!

So you think you're a pioneer—reading the latest brain-storms of the science-fiction writers. Go ahead. Imagine yourself pursuing a scantily-clad space maiden down the black corridors between the stars. If you're satisfied with this alone, dream on. But if you're not, we offer you a magazine unlike any you ever read before—a magazine of facts—a magazine which proves that **truth is stranger than science-fiction!**

- The fictioneers write stories about time being displaced. We prove that it can be and is!
- The fictioneers tell of magic minds at work on outlandish planets. **We prove they are working here—today!**
- The fictioneers dream of future ages when men are telepaths. **We prove they are telepaths today!**

If this sounds fantastic, then sit down with us and learn the truth. Know the facts about the amazing revolt against purely materialistic science that is shaking the world today. Learn about the findings of such men as Dr. J. B. Rhine of Duke University, J. B. Dunne, the pioneer aeronautical engineer who proved that Time could be displaced, and many others. Read the magazine of today that is moulding the minds of tomorrow.

READ FATE.

You can get 12 issues of FATE for only \$3.00—nearly 1600 pages of fascinating reading during the coming year. Write today. Subscribe to FATE, true stories of the strange, the unusual, the unknown.

FATE Magazine, Dept. MAG.
806 Dempster Street
Evanston, Ill.

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Enclosed is () cash () check () money order for \$_____

Begin my subscription with the _____ issue

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Letters from the Readers

MORE PHOTO COVERS!

Dear Ed:

I just finished reading the December issue of Madge and I enjoyed it so much that I just had to sit right down and write you.

I particularly enjoyed THE BEACHCOMBER. It's the type of story that just won't let you stop reading it. (But then, all the stories in IMAGINATION are like that!) I hope to be reading more of Damon Knight's work in the near future.

Like Jim Glass, whose letter appeared in the December issue, I hope to see more of those fine photo covers soon. Malcolm Smith surely is one of the top artists in the field.

Although this is my first letter it certainly won't be the last because I'll want to keep letting you know how much I enjoy reading Madge.

Eve Crossley
2312 Vivada Ave.
Orlando, Fla.

Malcolm Smith, blushing (a curious shade of martini green) with pleasure, assures us that the photo covers will continue on future issues. Matter of fact, we've got a real dilly coming up soon

NAVAL PASSWORD!

Dear Bill:

If you will recall the titles in the January, 1952 issue of Madge, you will be interested in the following true story concerning two officers in Uncle Sam's Navy.

It happened shortly after that issue appeared; a long-time Navy veteran, Lt. Hardy of the Aircraft Carrier USS Wright, received transfer orders which arrived, unhappily, just before payday. On leaving the carrier, he requested the paymaster to telegraph his due pay to his home address where he would be spending a brief leave before reporting for a new assignment.

The paymaster of the Wright complied, and a few days later the lieutenant was notified by Western Union that his money had arrived. He appeared at the window, but before the clerk would hand over the cash, Hardy was asked to complete a test question by way of identifying himself—a customary precaution taken by the sender in wiring money.

The question was: "ALIAS A—" Hardy couldn't keep from grinning at the clerk. "WOO-WOO!" he said, and the money was his.

You see, both he and the paymaster are Madge fans, and the ALIAS A WOO-WOO story was a particular favorite of theirs.

Lieutenant Hardy is now on the destroyer USS William C. Lawe, and since Ensign K. Springer is also aboard, you can easily guess how the latter's dad, who devised the woo-woos, heard about the incident.

Sherwood Springer
305 N. Lapeer Dr.
Beverly Hills, Cal.

Hey, now, could it be that Madge is part of the Navy's code these days? Our gal sure gets around And speaking of woo-woos, how about penning a new yarn for Madge's readers wlh

TOP SHORT STORY

Dear Ed:

I just finished reading the December issue of Madge and am immediately taking pen in hand to congratulate Damon Knight on his unusual and most enjoyable. THE BEACH-COMBER. I vote for more of Mr. Knight in the near future; his story was about the best short I've ever read.

I also congratulate you on your wonderful magazine. It's hard to find stories that are different, but IMAGINATION always comes through.

Laurie Heath
48 Glenville Ave.
Allston 34, Mass.

Thanks for the kind words, Laurie—and you come through again soon too, with another letter! . wlh

I DON'T LIKE—

Dear wlh:

I don't like science fiction magazines; I don't like "Stories of Science and Fantasy" either;—if by that subhead is meant, love and con-

flict transported via pulp and pseudo-snaffs into otherwhen and/or elsewhere.

I don't like the "mature" science fiction stories, if mature means: the witches wand takes the form of a sphere that absorbs matter at the wish of the owner—until the owner has piled complication upon complication that forces our owner-hero to use it as a mallet to drive thumb tacks into the photos of other-worlds to explode them like bubbles.

I don't like "continued" stories, period.

I especially don't like "continued on page—"

I don't like covers that sell gums—even when some excuse can be found in the lead (or other) story for a pinup. I dislike all covers that have no connection with the printed matter therein.

I don't like editor comments above story titles that inform me what the story is about, and I'm certain good writers resent the irritating practice.

I don't like story-type lists on the contents page, and long winded comments anent future issues.

I don't like to write. I don't like to write letters to the editor. I don't like to type—but you'll hear from me again.

When you print something I like I'll let you know.

John Carey
3122 E. Federal St.
Baltimore 13, Md.

Thanks, John, for the subscription you enclosed with your letter. Guess you DO like Madge! . wlh

HEY, McFARLAND!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I'd like to preface this letter by complimenting you on publishing such fine stories in the past as THE WEAPON FROM ETERNITY, AR-

MAGEDDON 1970, etc. The authors, Dwight Swain and Geoff St. Reynard, are really terrific.

I know that all the fans won't agree with me. I know one in particular—he had a letter in the December issue that I'd like to comment upon. One Clarence R. McFarland, Jr. In my opinion his letter didn't make any sense. First of all he said Madge was lousy, and asked if you the editor didn't care about your readers. Well, it seems fairly evident that if you didn't care about your readers you wouldn't have a reader's column in the first place! Apparently then our opinions mean something to you. Further, if the magazine is lousy, it would seem that a great many other readers do not share Mr. McFarland's views

Also, he said there are a lot of guys who could do a better editing job than you. Personally, I rate MADGE at the top of the list—and I think you've been doing a fine job.

Last, but not least, he says he doesn't like adventure in his science fiction magazines. That is by far the most ridiculous statement he made because a story would not be a story if it had no adventure in it! I would hate like the devil to have to read nothing but stories loaded with one scientific fact after another . . . if he likes "science" he can get all he wants in a popular science type magazine, but I doubt if any red-blooded person would enjoy reading a story without any adventure.

I don't think McFarland read his letter very carefully before he sent it in to Madge. I doubt if he really meant what he said.

Steve Pierson
16 Craigmoor Rd.
W. Hartford, Conn.

With a McFarland letter on deck we'll forego comment, Steve . . . with

WE'RE (HAH!) IMPROVING . . .

Dear Ed:

You continue to surprise me. I had no idea that my last letter would ever see print, botailed and emasculated as you seem to want them. I tried to make it as pungent as I possibly could, but you defeat me with a weapon I have no defense against, namely, your privilege of cutting or changing the wording to suit your ideas of propriety.

As for IMAGINATION, I'm afraid it has improved a little bit, at least to the point where I'm unable to resist buying it. It could still stand considerable in the way of improvement. To be specific, what it needs is a group of authors with more of a mature viewpoint. I have no quarrel with such writers as S. J. Byrne, Damon Knight, Kris Neville, and sometimes Daniel F. Galouye. They quite often come up with something to stir the imagination. Most of the others seem to cater to the so-called "juvenile" mind, and that, to my way of thinking is the only thing that can be wrong with any magazine. It has been my experience that those who read "Science Fiction" are of the more mature "mind groups", and are thus able to understand the more subtle nuances of "word magic" involved in "mature" literature. It had been my hope that when I first found your magazine it would give us, who like such things, the more mature and thought-provoking authors and their stories.

The competition for the "science fiction mind" grows more and more intense, and, I should think, would be one of the incentives to keep improving your magazine at all times, both in content and format. To be entirely frank with you, Madge is down to about fifth on my scale of

those I like, which is almost on a par with *Startling Stories* and the others of that tribe. There are some I no longer buy or read; those are the ones I rate tenth, or nearly a hundred per cent nonexistent as far as I'm concerned. I do hope you continue to improve your magazine, it would be something unthinkable to have to do with only three or four others for entertainment.

I still like the stories with an understandable base in science or pseudo science, whether it's the physical side, sociological, or psychological. I like people, and I like to study people and their interrelations. I like the same things in the stories I read. So many of the stories seem to depend on the old "love 'em, hate 'em, blast 'em" type of action.

Also, most of the characterizations are wooden, unemotional, a far cry from actuality. They speak their piece and run through their actions like automata, with no emotional interplay whatsoever, it seems, sometimes.

Continue to improve Madge and I'll continue to buy it.

With faint, but growing respect.

Clarence R. McFarland, Jr.
3351 Commodore Way
Seattle 99, Wash.

As we've gone on record so many times before — we're not trying to make people think with Madge's stories, we're only trying to entertain. We, and we think most people, read for relaxation and enjoyment. That's the purpose of the stories in Madge —and we don't intend to change that view. Of course we all want a story with a science or pseudo-science background; after all, that's what differentiates a science fiction story from a western. People are necessary in both and certainly their emotions should be shown realistic-

ally. We feel that Madge's stories do. As for improvement, we're glad you think we are doing just that. You can rest assured we don't sit and twiddle our thumbs between issues—we're constantly striving for improvements in all phases of the magazine. Let us know, along the way, when Madge hits in your first division wlh

MURDER—OR SOMETHING!

Dear Bill:

If anyone says anything against the Malcolm Smith cover on the December Madge I'll commit murder! . . . or something! That was one of the most popular covers (the original) at the recent Convention auction. A real nice job. (The original even looked better than the reproduction.)

CHILDREN OF THE CHRONOTRON—back when you featured Dwight Swain's last novel I said that wasn't the type of stuff for our Madge. Good adventure, and all that, but not quite for us. Now this new Byrne novel is what should be leading Madge all the time. It's science fiction, not space opera. Stuff like this, and St. Reynard's BEWARE THE USURPERS! is what will keep Madge at the top.

I liked Dan Galouye's THE LEVITANT very much, but I think he underwrote it a bit. While he has obvious talent, I doubt your statement that he will be the find of the year.

Another thing, let's not give the impression of introducing new authors when it isn't so. You didn't say so in so many words, but you gave the impression that you introduced Bill Venable. You didn't. Other Worlds did.

Henry Moskowitz

Three Bridges, N. J.

Ok, Hank, if we gave the wrong impression, we stand corrected. Fact is, we just didn't happen to see a

Venable yarn in OW. At any rate he is a new writer. Galouye? Yep, we think he's the boy of the year, and if you don't think so yet wait until you read his great new novel, THE FIST OF SHIVA. It will be coming up soon . wlk

CONCERNING CONCEPTS

Dear Ed:

Herewith some clarification on concepts. Mr. Vance, in the December Madge letter section, praised the concept in TONIGHT THE SKY WILL FALL. I refer you to Comet, July 1941 issue. There you will find "The Street That Wasn't There" by Simak and Jacobi. This story precedes by ten years the concept and excellence of TTSWF. Now I'm not saying, and I never have said, that I don't like Galouye's writing. The ideas are good, also, but they are second and third hand! Originality of concept I feel sure would rocket Mr. Galouye to the top of the field. As it is, with all the magazines and writers, good though they may be, science fiction runs the risk of stagnation — mere rehashings of ideas better put the first time. " pompous phrases marched across the landscape in search of an idea." to quote Stevenson completely out of context, but aptly.

However, there is another extreme horribly exemplified by Mr. Wallace Parsons' view on TOFFEE. I feel that TOFFEE is the top feature of Madge because: she's screamingly funny, and, no one even pretends to say Toffee is "dramatic" "magnificent", "new", etc.

Dave van Arnam
1740 34th Ave. N.

St. Petersburg, Fla.

We don't exactly feel you have to be completely original to be a success as a writer, Dave. Take the

currently still popular THE GREATEST STORY EVER TOLD by Oursler. A rehash of the oldest book—the Bible. The point is, it was well done, and captured the public. Ideas are not the mark of a successful yarn—the handling of an idea is. Besides, completely new ideas on concepts in science fiction are few and far between these days...It's the way various writers handle accepted ideas that provides the entertainment we're all looking for. . . . wlk

SLOW SUICIDE . . . ?

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Starting at the beginning, with the December issue, I liked the cover. Except that it was just a wee bit inconsistent with the story. Their ship didn't blast the spheroids, but made another type of communication. Ah, well . . .

Turning to the contents page, CHILDREN OF THE CHRONOTRON started out a little slow and didn't catch up until the last third of the yarn. Then it did all right. The rest of the stories are beyond me as far as rating is concerned—they were all top quality.

Your editorial was just short of a masterpiece. I like the idea of organizing science fiction writers, not that I have any personal stake in it, because I haven't, but if they can write better copy and be assured of better rates for this better copy, then I'm all for it. However, those pitfalls you mentioned are not minimized by the aims of the organization, but are very apparent. So to the SFWA, I say, plenty of luck!

Your fillers in Madge certainly interest me. I fervently hope you continue to use them. Also, if you suddenly decide to discontinue the reader's department, the fanzine reviews, and TOMORROW'S SCI-

ENCE, I'll think seriously of cancelling my subscription! Not much danger of that, however, as they all seem to be very popular.

Gerry Leonard's request for serials falls on dead ears, from my standpoint. I think it's just slow suicide. Don't use them . .

Thanks for a wonderful magazine.

A/1C James White

AF 19247861

2275th Base Service Sqdrn.

Beale AFB, Cal.

Slight variations in the cover scene and the actual story scene prompting the cover are what an artist calls taking "artistic license" for dramatic effect. Usually we manage to keep the cover scene fairly accurate . . .
wh

CUBAN FANS NOTE

Dear Mr. Hamling:

While attending the 10th World Science Fiction Convention in Chicago over last Labor Day, I had the pleasure of meeting you. Perhaps you will remember.

I'm wondering if you could include this letter in your reader section, to acquaint fans in the Havana area with the news that a fan club is being organized here. The hardest part seems to be contacting other fans!

I'd like to hear from any fans in Havana interested in joining. My phone number is B9-2129. Robert Fuentes will also handle inquiries and applications, phone F-5930.

I should not want to close without offering a good word for Madge. I only became acquainted with "her" a year ago, but it's turning out to be a lasting friendship!

Raoul Bru

Ave. Central 18

Reparte Kohly, Marianao

Cuba

We certainly do remember meeting

you, Raoul, and we hope to see you again at Philadelphia. In the meantime, good luck with your club.
wh

WE IS A DAHLING! . . .

Dar Mr. Hamling:

This I shall grant you: Madge is entertaining and interesting. But as I started to read the letter section recently my fingers became stuck in the goo. It is strange they haven't started calling you darling!

Madge is not wonderful, exciting, amusing, the best stf book, amazing, illustrious, beautiful, or delightful. It is, as I say, interesting and entertaining with a high average of good stories.

While the stories are enjoyable, the letter section is usually boring. Surely the fans have something to say besides sickeningly sweet compliments on how wonderful Madge is.

Fredrick B. Christoff

39 Cameron St., S.

Kitchener, Ont., Canada

That's right, Fred, just like you say, Madge is wonderful, terrific, super-elegant, and, in short, a positive dahlmg. Some gall! . . .
wh

A GOOD YEAR

Dear Bill:

The December issue marking the end of another year for Madge, I believe I'll scratch down a few words for the record.

An auspicious year's end, it was, with what was probably the best issue to date. I never thought I'd be compelled to say that a Byrne novel made an issue good, but I must now. CHILDREN OF THE CHRONOTRON held me until the end, which is a rare thing for me these days where so many stories still lean toward no ideas or no characters, and

one writer in a dozen being able to include both and still invent a readable plot. Byrne has figured out how to do it.

I've been impressed with Dan Galouye too. Particularly his RE-BIRTH early last year, though truly, as one reader put it, it was based on an ancient theme. Needless to say, I like Neville and St. Reynard.

As far as serials go (a topic of some heated discussion in Madge's pages) nobody likes a month wait, but would you sacrifice a terrific, long length story because of this?

There's little to complain about in IMAGINATION in the way of format; makeup is excellent, with none of the carelessness you see in certain other magazines. Your covers are usually the best, and I suppose I must confess that the pictures inside are good enough too. I enjoy your editorials too, especially when you've got a point to make.

I think the reader section should be shortened considerably. I should think the space devoted to a reader section would be considered in the same light as story space—space which must be filled with interesting reading to justify its existence. I can't see where the repetitious listing of story titles, etc. has much value. If you'd run more good letters, such as the Vance piece in December, I'd say ok. The same thing is true of FANDORA'S BOX. If somebody can't figure out something to say in a column, the column should be dropped. The juvenile air of the "Box" is particularly odious to me, as is the constant harping on the theme that science fiction is good and true. We have all known that for years. We don't have to be told. Such a column might have a use in the Satevepost, but not in a high class science fiction magazine.

Your fillers don't impress me, but

at least they are not downright objectionable.

I'm glad to see you've managed a six-weekly schedule, with full monthly in the offing. Congratulations for rather consistently picking good stories over the past year. (I will overlook your concessions to crud-opera fans!)

Keep them coming, ed, and here's looking for an even finer year.

Don Wilson

833 Ocean Ave.

Santa Monica, Cal.

Cut the reader section? We'll leave that up to the rest of the readers! (Bet the answer is no!) Speaking of the coming year, we've really got some fine feature novels scheduled. And what with top-notch covers (including some Malcolm Smith photo covers) and—we guarantee—full monthly production, it looks like the best year yet. Wait and see! . . . wh

AN INCONSISTENCY ?

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I've read IMAGINATION for some time, and have found it uniformly good. Consequently it seems rather ironic to me that the current December issue should contain an item such as your editorial regarding increased effort on the part of writers being the only way for them to increase their earning power, coupled with a story, the caliber of which would indicate to the discerning reader that all your editorializing really means very little.

In S. J. Byrne's CHILDREN OF THE CHRONOTRON you have published a tale the components of which include:

1. An extremely hackneyed plot.
2. A naive writing style which skirts dangerously the "9-B composition class" level.
3. Some incredibly poor characterizations.

I doubt that the fact that as inferior an effort as this has attained publication will spur any writer on to improve the quality of his work.

I do not believe there is much room for these pious editorials in *Madge* as long as things like the Byrne novel find a place on the contents page.

Charles C. Sords
506 Sherman Ave.
Pittsburgh 12, Pa.

First of all, we don't believe the Byrne story was as bad as you say it was; certainly other reader reaction bears us out. The fact is, our editorial, and the stories in the issue, were — and are — two separate entities. We were discussing a writers' organization, and its aims. Naturally writers' works enter into this discussion. Our views therein on quality work are correct, we feel and certainly you, as a reader would reap the benefit of better and better stories. If the Byrne story were really as bad as you say, then our editorial certainly provides an answer. However, in this particular case the point is not necessarily valid since many readers liked the story a great deal. The whole point is that no stone should be left unturned to bring finer stories from the typewriter and into print. Diligent work between editors and writers is one way to do it—as long as both parties are aware of their responsibilities wlh

AFTER SEVERAL YEARS

Dear Ed:

Although I have read science fiction magazines for several years, this is my first letter to an editor. The December issue of *Madge* was so good that I had to write you!

You seem to have a really top quality publication. I'd just like to know how you manage to find such

a diversified collection of good stories. Rarely have I ever seen so many good ones in any one issue of a sf magazine. Currently I rate *CHILDREN OF THE CHRONOTRON* as tops. Byrne's presentation of the reactions of a cross section of humanity snatched from familiar environment and placed in an era a billion years in the future was masterful. I'd say that the author got hold of a good idea and really did it justice.

TIME GRABBER and *THE LEVITANT* were the two top shorts. It seems to me that we get all too few good humorous stories in the sf field. Too many authors prefer to dwell on dismal subjects—death and destruction. *TIME GRABBER*, however, was hilarious enough to please everyone.

Daniel F. Galouye's masterpiece on mass psychology impressed me greatly. I have always been interested in the workings of the human mind, and Mr. Galouye exposed some of its poorer characteristics. Galouye is tops—if only because the rest of the readers think so too!

Madge's shorts on scientific subjects are very good. I know of no other magazine that carries as interesting an assortment, or as many. Too, you have a large reader section. Keep it that way. The more people who are allowed to make constructive criticism about a magazine, the better the magazine will be.

Hoping you keep up the good work.

Jonathon F. M. Gossage
Apple Tree Shott
Como, Quebec, Canada

Glad you like the stories in Madge so well, Jon. That's our business—to please you. We'll keep doing just that. As to your point about many stories being dismal, we think you've got something there. We've noticed that too—not in Madge—and

frankly, we can't get excited over frustrated endings. As in life, we think a story's problems should be satisfactorily resolved. True, they don't always work out that way, but a writer can create his own ending and leave us with a satisfied feeling. For most of us that provides pleasant reading. In Madge you can count on it. . wlh

turning to page 162 and taking advantage of the subscription offer there. You'll be getting a bargain, and the best in science fiction entertainment to boot. What could be better? wlh

A PROMISE KEPT

Dear Ed:

I have been a science fiction and fantasy fan for quite some time—ten years to be exact, but have never subscribed before. It did not seem practical as my husband is in the Navy and our movements are entirely too unpredictable.

However, at long last we are on shore duty and may enjoy some of the privileges of a settled life.

In writing this letter I am keeping a promise to myself—to subscribe to my favorite magazine as soon as circumstances would permit. And since IMAGINATION has climbed to the top of my list of favorites during the past few years it receives my first subscription.

... Also, Madge thus becomes the recipient of my first fan letter. In this regard I'd like to say that I've enjoyed Madge since its first issue and I know I shall continue to. Just one thing—please don't use serials!

Jackie Sibert

636 Kentucky

Lawrence, Kansas

We'll see to it that your promise is rewarded with some top-notch reading pleasure, Jackie. And thanks for the high compliment. . wlh

CAN'T SEE TOFFEE

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Upon reading the letter section in the December issue of Madge, I was delighted to find a letter that called your TOFFEE stories "trash". I have been reading each one as it came along, then reading all the wild

HE PICKED THE BEST!

Dear Ed:

This is my first experience in writing to an editor of a science fiction magazine, so naturally I picked the best!

I have been reading Madge for a number of years, and I can honestly say that I have enjoyed every issue. You sure have a terrific magazine.

In looking back over the year a few of the really fine stories that particularly impressed me were: THE WEAPON FROM ETERNITY, THE DANGEROUS DOLL, ARMAGEDDON 1970, and THE DARK CAME OUT TO PLAY. Of course, like so many other readers, TOFFEE is my favorite girl!

I wonder if you could help me out with a story that Madge published. It concerned a group of people who left Earth on a space ship constructed of some "sticky" substance that digested everything it received. I realize this is a sketchy outline but I'd like to know the story and issue.

Thanks, and I'm enclosing my subscription as I don't want to miss anything during the coming year.

Warren Ferguson

152 Grant

Brooklyn 8, N. Y.

The story you speak of was LOOK TO THE STARS by Willard Hawkins, in the October 1950 Madge. Speaking of not wanting to miss anything, how about the rest of you

enthusiasm in the letters and wondering if perhaps I were an alien in disguise. The discovery of this fellow Martian in your midst heartens me to write and get off my chest a few things which your TOFFEE stories provoke me to say.

I usually enjoy IMAGINATION very much; it is one of the top on my list of favorites. Madge has published some wonderful stories (like TONIGHT THE SKY WILL FALL! and SPECIAL DELIVERY) as another letter mentioned in the December issue. But I'm afraid I can't get along any too well with TOFFEE. The stories just aren't funny to me — they're excruciating. The characters and their personal relationships seem warped, sensational, grotesque, and in rather bad taste. Maybe it's because I'm a female fan and also of a rather matter of fact turn of mind. The humor appears to be entirely of the prattle, custard pie, or wife-with-the-rolling pin variety.

I know I am in the minority and I don't expect anything to happen just because I out of so many don't like the TOFFEE series. But it never hurts in a Democracy to be vocal. And aside from TOFFEE, I do enjoy Madge a great deal.

Mary E. D'Imperio
1917 K-St., N.W.
Washington, D. C.

Toffee is always a subject of controversy, Mary. For the majority of Madge's readers, and ourselves, the keen wit employed by Charlie Myers keeps us in stitches. If you have ever read and liked the works of Thorne Smith you'll know what we mean. Not that we're implying the Toffee series is "lifted", but the stories are written in the same humorous fantasy vein Smith made so famous . . . Incidentally, how did you like Kris Neville's new novel

in this issue? Up to the standard he set with SPECIAL DELIVERY? And Dan Galouye has a great new novel coming up . . . with

TOMORROW'S TALENT

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I've followed Madge's progress since its first issue and I want to add my congratulations to the flood you've already received in the past few years. After reading the letter columns there doesn't seem to be much point in enumerating all the fine points of Madge, but good science fiction seems to be coming into its golden age, and Madge is a leader in its field. It's a select field, too. I would hesitate to name many magazines other than *Galaxy*, *Astounding Science Fiction*, *Amazing*, *Other Worlds*, and *IF* as batting in your league.

Although I have read a couple of stories in Madge which I didn't particularly care for, I have never found one I disliked enough to get dramatic about it.

The final point I'd like to make is to compliment you on your interest in new writers. That's where tomorrow's science fiction talent lies!

Charles W. Ryan, ET2
1st Div., USS Bushnell
(AS-15) c/o FPO
Key West, Fla.

You'll find a great deal of new talent in Madge's pages during the coming year, Chuck. We're always on the lookout for new writers. Which about winds up this issue. Remember, the April issue goes on sale February 3rd, and it features a great new St. Reynard story which you won't want to miss—and what we think is the best cover, Bill Terry has ever painted. Watch for it. with

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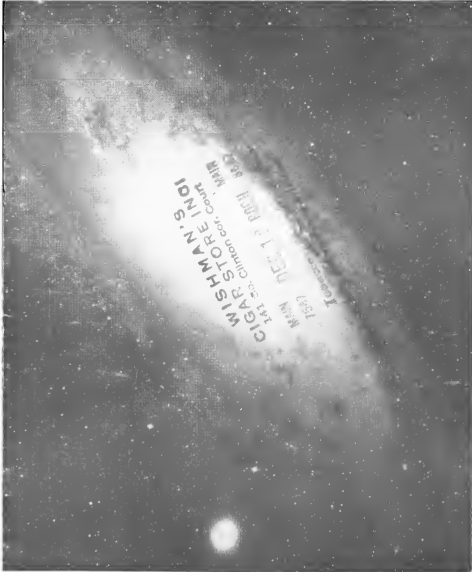
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TOMORROW'S SCIENCE

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